

Project name: Alternative History Project
Date of interview: 2008-05-14
Location of interview: Sebokeng, Gauteng
Language of interview: Sotho
Name of Interviewer/s: Dale McKinley & Ahmed Veriava
Name of Interviewee/s: Thulo Ezekiel Motseki
Name of translator: Joseph Matutoane
Name of transcriber: Moses Moremi
Audio file name: AHP_SEB_MotsekiThuloEzekiel_20080514

SECOND INTERVIEW WITH THULO EZEKIEL MOTSEKI

Dale Mckinley (DM): We are here with our second interview with Ezekiel, and first of all thank you again for agreeing to talk with us.

Thulo Ezekiel Motseki (TEM): Okay.

DM: Ezekial, we are going to go right back to the beginning. I want you just to tell us if you can, to tell us a little bit about your early childhood. What kind of things did you get up to with you and your friends?

TEM: We grew up together with my friends until we started school.

DM: What kind of things did you do when you were a kid here?

TEM: We used to play soccer on the streets, and we'll go hunt for the birds in the fields.

DM: What kind of house did you grow up in, what was your house like?

TEM: It was a mud house, in Evaton.

DM: A mud house in Evaton ... how many people were staying in your home?

TEM: We were eight if I am not mistaken.

DM: What were your living conditions like, did you have access to water, to electricity, to those kind of things?

TEM: Although it's hard for me to remember, I know we had water, but we did not have electricity.

AV (Ahmed Veriava): The house that you were staying in, was that the house that your father built?

TEM: It was my father's.

DM: Tell us a little bit about your family. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

TEM: We are three boys and a girl.

DM: And where are you? Are you first, last ... where are you in the ages of your brothers and sister?

TEM: I'm the first born.

DM: So did that give you a lot of responsibility, as the first born?

TEM: I did have responsibilities. My father passed away when we were young and I had to drop out of school to go and look for a job for us to survive, it was when we were here at Sebokeng.

DM: How old were you when your father passed?

TEM: I'm not completely sure, but I was around seventeen or eighteen..

DM: And how old was the youngest child at that time, the last born?

TEM: The last born was about four or five years old.

DM: Tell us what were your favorite subjects when you went to school?

TEM: I loved them all, but I preferred my own language.

DM: Did you like school, did you enjoy it?

TEM: I loved school.

AV: How did it make you feel when you had to leave school?

TEM: It did affect me because I was not able to go the Std. that I wanted to ...but I had no choice but to leave school.

DM: Did the rest of your brothers and sisters, were they able to complete school?

TEM: Not all of them managed to finish.

AV: How many of them finished?

TEM: No one passed matric. One did up to Std. 8 while the others left at Std.7, where I left.

AV: And yourself, how far did you go?

Interpreter: Std.7

DM: When you were growing up here in Evaton, did you ever have any engagement or meetings with white people?

TEM: I was very young when we were in Evaton, I don't remember anything.

DM: When was the first time that you started meeting white people, was it when you started working?

TEM: Yes.

AV: When you were a child did you understand that in South Africa black people and white people are treated differently?

TEM: Yes we heard that whites and blacks were not treated equally.

AV: As a child, why did you think that was?

TEM: As I grew up I saw that whites were superior and I thought that was the way of life, we thought everything was theirs.

DM: When you were a child did you ever get to leave this areas, to go to town or anywhere else ... did you travel ... even just to downtown Joburg ...?

Interpreter: You mean to stay there?

DM: No, just to see ...

TEM: Mostly the towns around Sebokeng like Vanderbijlpark and Vereeniging, where we went for some piece jobs.

DM: Did you ever experience, when you did those piece jobs and when you traveled, did you ever experience the kind of racism we talked about, the way things were before '94?

TEM: Because I was young, I didn't notice those kinds of things as I was only looking for a piece job just to earn some few cents.

DM: You told us that your father died in 1973, is that right?

TEM: No, I got it wrong there, actually he died in 1979.

DM: How did your father pass?

TEM: He passed away in the line of duty. He was an electrician, so when he was working on a step ladder it fell and he was paralysed in his leg. Since then he was disabled and he got sick until he passed away.

DM: How long after the accident was it until he passed?

TEM: A few years, I don't remember exactly how many.

DM: Did your father get any workmen's compensation or any support after the accident?

TEM: Not as far as I remember, he didn't receive anything.

DM: So up until that point he was the bread winner, the one that was bringing income into the house?

TEM: Since he was here at home, that was when my mother went looking for a job. She started selling things like cow intestines and things like that to put the food on the table.

DM: How was it for you, as the eldest son, when your father passed away? Did you feel that now you were the father, essentially, of the family?

TEM: No, I didn't feel like a father figure because I was very young. It was just like helping the family out.

DM: You told us that you liked soccer as the game that you played when you were young. Tell us what position did you play and what were your favorite teams at the time?

TEM: When I was playing, there were no positions, the coach would just give you a position to play. I would play as a defender if the coach wants me at the back. My favorite team of all times is Kaizer Chiefs.

DM: Are you still a Chiefs' fan?

TEM: Yes.

DM: So you must have been happy the other day when they beat Pirates, it was a good game (laughing).

DM: You also told us that you went to church, that you enjoy going to church. What church do you belong to or did you belong to?

TEM: I go to the Sendroma (?) Apostolic Church.

DM: Are you still a member of the church?

TEM: Yes.

DM: And Ezekial when you were young, what about the girls? In other words, did you, as a young boy, hang around and have lots of fun with the girls?

TEM: Yes we had so much fun with the girls, we would play all the games with them. But as for sex, no, we didn't even think of it..

DM: But did you have a girlfriend?

TEM: No, I didn't have any.

DM: When did you first have a girlfriend, how old were you ...?

TEM: I can't remember the exact age, but it was after I started work.

DM: Tell us, what was your first job?

TEM: It was at the abattoir.

DM: How old were you then?

TEM: I was about fifteen or sixteen years.

DM: And this was the piece job or was it permanent?

TEM: It was a permanent job. It was when I was looking for a better job, as it was when my father was already passed.

DM: Did you like working at the abattoir?

TEM: It was a good job because I also had the advantage of taking some meat back home for the family.

DM: between yourself and you mother, you were supporting the family ... the two of you were now the breadwinners for the family?

TEM: By the time I started working my mother wasn't selling anymore.

DM: So you were the sole supporter of the family?

TEM: Yes, I was.

DM: Were you able to earn enough to support the family?

TEM: The money was not enough because I earned R82 every fortnight.

DM: Did you get any support from other family members, or how did the family survive?

TEM: Yes, my mother sold liquor, but she sold it secretly because it was considered illegal.

DM: During the time that you started working – this was now in the early 1980s – there were a lot of things that were going on in this area, Evaton, Sharpeville and in this Vaal area, politically in '81,

'82, '83 and the Asinamali Campaign ... What do you remember about that time in terms of the politics?

TEM: I remember the incidents in 1984, when I was still working at the abattoir, it was called 'Asinamali'

DM: What do you remember about that campaign particularly?

TEM: I remember when the government offices and shops of councilors were burnt/looted and people getting killed..

DM: Were you or your family involved at all?

TEM: Yes, I was a part of that because the older guys would forced us to join and support the struggle and not sit in our houses.

DM: ... when did you get the job at SAMANCOR, what year?

TEM: I started at SAMANCOR in 1986.

DM: You told us about working at SAMANCOR but tell us what an average day was for you ... what kinds of things were you doing, on an average day?

TEM: We used to work with the slag, taking it out of the braziers. We would make a furrow for the slag.

DM: From what you were making at the abattoir to SAMANCOR, what was your income, what were getting paid when you first started working at SAMANCOR in 1986?

TEM: There was a difference.

DM: So how much were you making when you started at SAMANCOR?

TEM: Although I can't remember exactly, it was around R300 and something

DM: Per month or per week.

Interpreter: Per week.

DM: So that was quite a jump in your income. Did that make you feel good ... were you able to now support your family fully?

TEM: Yes.

DM: Were you still single then?

TEM: Yes.

DM: When did you meet the woman who later became your wife, when was that?

TEM: It was in 1997 or 1998.

DM: Okay, so ten years after you started working at SAMANCOR?

TEM: Yes.

DM: So how was it like for you from '86 ... you were a single man with a fairly good job ... did you have a lot of fun during that time?

TEM: Yes, my life changed, there was some difference.

DM: What kinds of things did you do outside of work?

TEM: We'll meet with friends and go to soccer matches.

DM: I'm assuming from what you've told us that you've never been a big drinker, that you never were hanging out at the tavern and the shebeens very much?

TEM: Not at all.

DM: What about your brothers and sister, were they still in school or were they working as well? (some discussion) ... what were they doing in the late '80s and early 90s?

TEM: They were still at school in the '80s.

DM: So what happened when they left school?

TEM: They left because we struggled so much. I was the only one with the income and that was not enough to keep them at school so they had to stay at home.

DM: What I am asking is, at what point did your brothers and sister start working?

TEM: It wasn't too long. The one that comes after me did work at SAMANCOR but he didn't stay there for long because he was also not healthy.

DM: Were any of your brothers and sisters, in the late '80s and '90s, were they involved in the political struggles that were going on?

TEM: No, they were too young by then.

DM: Just so we're understanding ... now, how old is your youngest sibling ... right now?

TEM: The last born was born in 1973.

DM: So you got married you said in 1997?

TEM: Yes.

DM: So tell us how you met your wife?

TEM: One of my family members was the one through whom I met her. He made the contact for me to go over to Kimberley to see her as a possible wife.

DM: Tell us a little bit about your wife. Obviously, you got along very well and you got married. What did she do at the time ... was she a student, was she working ...?

TEM: She had finished school by then and she was just staying at home.

DM: When you married, did you still live in the same house with the rest of the family or did you move into another place?

TEM: We stayed in the same house.

DM: The same house you had grown up in?

TEM: Yes.

DM: Were you able to improve the house as you started working ... add onto it and make it better?

TEM: Yes.

DM: When you were married, how many people were living in the home?

TEM: We were still with my mother and my siblings.

DM: What was it like in SAMANCOR during the period from 1991-94, during the period when there was a lot of unrest and the negotiations were taking place? Did anything change in the workplace at SAMANCOR at that time?

TEM: We were engaged in things like strikes. Although we were trying to fight the company we would never get what we wanted. For instance, if we wanted a R2 increase, we would be given R1. Not much was changing for the better.

DM: So, at the time in the period in the early 1990s before the elections, were the workers at work talking about things that were going on and if they were talking what were you guys saying to each other ... did you have discussions amongst yourselves as workers?

TEM: We had meetings every week between the company and the unions.

DM: Did the union that you joined – you told us you joined NUMSA – did NUMSA have political discussions?

TEM: Not much was said by NUMSA in terms of politics but we would chant about Oliver Tambo and Mandela in the workplace.

DM: And how did management respond to those kinds of things?

TEM: The management would send us letters telling us not to do such things at the workplace and we felt like we were being intimidated.

DM: Was there ever any clashes with police, conflict, violence?

TEM: No, they did not call the police often. It was only after we were retrenched that police used to be engaged because we would go there and chant and toyi-toyi around the gate. It was only then they would call the police to stop our activities.

DM: During that time, outside of SAMANCOR, did you go to marches and rallies during that period up until '94 ... you know, after the leadership was released there were all these big rallies and marches around?

TEM: Yes.

DM: Tell us about one of those that you remember.

TEM: I can remember the 1984 unrest

DM: Okay, but we're talking about the period 1990-94. In other words, after the ANC and PAC were un-banned, after the leadership was released and there were all of these rallies and marches ... that is the period I am talking about.

TEM: I remember when Oliver Tambo was released and the rally at FNB stadium

DM: Did you go?

TEM: Yes

DM: Describe that experience to us.

TEM: I recall the atmosphere at FNB, where people were happy and there was hope of change. We thought the release of Oliver Tambo would change our lives for the better.

DM: How did it make you feel personally?

TEM: I was happy and hoping ...

DM: And then the elections happened and everything else ... was that a positive experience for you?

TEM: No, I didn't see any changes.

DM: Did you vote in 1994?

TEM: Yes, I voted.

AV: Did you vote ever again?

TEM: I'm not sure, I'll have to see about that.

DM: But did you vote again in the 1999 and 2004 elections?

TEM: Yes I did vote again.

DM: You were still working at SAMANCOR during that time, so tell us what life was like for you outside of SAMANCOR? In other words, what life was like in the home, in the community ... were things better for you and your family at that point or were they the same?

TEM: There is no difference

DM: Okay, I wasn't asking whether there was difference, I was asking what life was like.

TEM: Life was like it was before because I was still working. There was not much of a change in life - we had to go work and get that little just to keep us going.

DM: What did the rest of your family think, you younger brothers and sisters?

TEM: I can't say because we never really talked much about politics.

DM: Were there any new opportunities for your brothers and sister in terms of work and other activities?

TEM: No, nothing.

DM: So most everybody still stayed at home?

TEM: Yes.

DM: Okay at that point ... you told us in the previous interview that you started to feel ill by the late 1990s right ... that's when you started to feel a bit ill at work?

TEM: Yes, it was around 1997/8/9.

DM: Up until the time when you started feeling sick, what were the main needs in your life? In other words, what were you spending most of your time and money doing, supporting the family ...?

TEM: I had other things I wanted to do but my family was my number one priority.

DM: Were you able to do that? Did you get a raise, was the money enough?

TEM: I didn't manage everything but what I managed, I did.

DM: So you were able to support the basic needs of your family?

TEM: Yes I managed.

DM: What did you spend most of the money on, was it for food, transport, services ...?

TEM: I spent a lot on food and services.

DM: Were you paying for both water and electricity?

TEM: Yes, that was rentals by then.

AV: The flat rate

Interpreter: Yes, the flat rate

DM: Is this house different from the family home? Did you move into this house later?

Interpreter: You mean Evaton?

DM: The last time I was asking, at least up until the early '90s, you were still in the same family home. So when did you move into this house, or is this the same house?

TEM: It is still the same.

AV: The house that you were staying in as a child, the mud house, where was that?

TEM: Evaton. Then from Evaton we moved here

AV: Okay, so what year did you move into this house?

TEM: 1968

AV: This was a council house?

TEM: Yes

AV: And at the moment, who owns the title deed for this house?

TEM: Now?

AV: Yes. Is it still council or did the council transfer ownership to you?

TEM: It belongs to us because they said that after ten years living in the house it becomes your own.

AV: So you don't have any money owing on this house?

TEM: The house is ours, but we do pay Masakhane.

AV: So you still have to pay your rates and services?

TEM: Yes.

AV: Do you pay?

TEM: It is not easy. But we manage to buy the electricity card so we can cook and have enough for the lights.

DM: So I'm assuming that you have the prepaid electricity meter?

TEM: Yes.

DM: How much do you estimate you spend every month on electricity?

TEM: I'm not sure because I'm not the one buying electricity; it's my younger brother.

DM: Do you have any guess about maybe what it is?

TEM: It's about R100.

DM: Do you have enough to have the electricity when you need it? In other words, at night time do you run the electricity and all the lights and things?

TEM: Yes, we do but load-shedding is giving us a problem.

DM: What did you know about when you started working ... you told us a little bit about this ... but I just wanted to ask another question. What did you know about environmental safety at the time that you got sick? In other words, were you aware of anything there that might be bad for your health?

TEM: No, I didn't have an idea.

DM: Was there an official or anybody from an organisation that ever came and talked to workers about these things?

TEM: The only people who talked about our safety and working conditions were the people trained at SAMANCOR.

DM: You told us that in 1998 you were diagnosed with epilepsy, is that correct?

TEM: Yes.

DM: But you worked until 2001?

TEM: Yes.

DM: Okay, so what I want to know given that you were diagnosed and worked for another three years. What was it like for you to work with you progressively realising that you had this illness?

TEM: The conditions were not good for me. My other fear was working with chemicals and because of my epilepsy that they might fall on me.

DM: Did you ever have an epileptic attack while you were working?

TEM: Several times

DM: And what happened when that occurred?

TEM: I wouldn't know because I would be unconscious and then I would find myself in First Aid.

DM: Every time that happened to you, did they change your situation, did they take you to another place or did you just go straight back into the same work environment?

TEM: They would take me back to the same job.

DM: Did you take any sick leave during this time?

TEM: They let me go to my own doctor and then instructed the doctor to write a letter that would tell them what my problem was. I was given six months sick leave by my doctor, but under the instructions of SAMANCOR.

DM: What year was that when you took that sick leave?

TEM: I think it was 1999

DM: And when you took the sick leave ... I am assuming you stayed at home most of the time ... did you feel much better after that, did you take medication?

TEM: During the sick leave the illness was better because it was not like the time I was at the company. I was feeling a little better.

DM: So when you went back to work you were feeling much stronger?

TEM: I was feeling better

DM: Did you go back to the same place you had left or did you go into a different job?

TEM: The same job.

DM: And did you then start suffering from more epileptic fits again, after that?

TEM: It continued until now.

DM: Besides the fact that you were supporting your family and you needed to work, did you at any time approach the management, the union or anybody else to say, 'I want to stop working, I am sick but I need some support'?

TEM: The management and the union shop stewards, they knew I was sick. But I preferred not to go to management to talk about my illness, I didn't approach them about stepping down.

DM: During that time that you were sick, how many other workers there ... I am assuming that other workers began to get sick as well ... did you talk amongst each others about what was happening?

TEM: We did talk amongst ourselves about the company causing us sicknesses, even with those who were not sick yet.

DM: Was there any talking about doing something, trying to do something about it?

TEM: It was not easy to approach the management about our problems.

DM: During that entire time did anything happen ... were there work stoppages, actions by the workers, anything?

TEM: We didn't stop working because of the sickness, but we did put the tools down about the issue of a raise. We were made to believe that the company was looking after us because they used to take us to the First Aid and for x-rays and they would tell us that we are fine.

DM: You told us in our previous interview that because of this illness and as the illness got worse, life at home was very difficult for you and eventually that led to your wife leaving you. When did that happen?

TEM: I can't remember the exact date, but it was just after I got sick.

DM: What about the rest of your family ... how did they respond to what was happening?

TEM: It was bad for everyone, the whole family was affected.

DM: Can you tell us a little bit about how they were affected?

TEM: They tried to convince her to come back, explaining to her the situation I'm in, that I didn't choose to be like this and it was because of the job.

DM: What did your brothers and sisters say to you at the time, how did they respond to your illness as their brother?

TEM: They were all very supportive and told me it's not the end of the world. They felt shame for me, that my illness had resulted in my wife and I going apart.

DM: How did your extended family respond to the situation ... uncles, aunts ... ?

TEM: The uncles also tried to convince her to stay, they even went over to her place and talked with her family. But she refused.

DM: So you had a very supportive family?

TEM: Yes, they supported.

(Change of Tape)

DM: Ezekial ... since you were retrenched, since 2001 for these last several years, what have the doctors told you about your illness, what have they said to you, what you should expect in terms of your life?

TEM: It's been a long time to see the doctors. I couldn't go because of financial constraints.

DM: When was the last time you saw a doctor?

TEM: 199 ... I can't remember when, but it was when I took my sick leave from SAMANCOR, when my employers sent me to see one.

DM: So, since then you have not seen a doctor?

TEM: No.

DM: Have you had any access to medication since then?

TEM: No.

DM: You told us that when you were retrenched, you got a payout. SAMANCOR paid you, I think you said, R60-70 000 ... is that right?

TEM: R70 000, yes.

DM: Besides that, and you said it did not go very far for you ... what do you think should be provided by SAMANCOR? What do you think they should have done?

TEM: They should have given us at least R5 million for each person so that I could go to the doctor and if death strikes my family, I must have something to live on.. I mean, we're still young; we still have a long time until we get our pensions.

DM: What kind of income do you live on now?

TEM: Nothing ..

DM: So where do you get money, is it from your family ...?

TEM: We live on my mother's pension money and my younger brother who is working.

DM: Who now stays with you in this house?

TEM: It's me, my mother, my brother and the other brother stays in the outside room with his wife and his two kids. My sister stays in her own house.

DM: Is anybody besides your brother working?

TEM: No

DM: So, the whole family survives on your mothers pension?

TEM: Yes.

DM: I don't think we asked this question last time but do you or anyone in the family receive any kind of government grants?

TEM: No..

DM: Have you made an attempts to apply for a disability grant or things like that?

TEM: No, I haven't tried yet.

DM: I imagine life is quite difficult trying to survive on a pension ... what kind of things do you spend the money on here in this family now?

TEM: We buy mealie meal, electricity and other basic food like sugar and things.

DM: Does that take up all of the money that comes into the house?

TEM: Yes.

DM: What would you say to those who continue to work at SAMANCOR and places like it, given your experience, given what's happened to you ... what would you say to those workers there?

TEM: I would say to them that they should have themselves checked by doctors on a regular basis. After that they must be given a report which must be taken to SAMANCOR so that they can diagnose them and then they should demand from SAMANCOR what is belonging to them while they still have the power, so they can start to see the other life outside of SAMANCOR.

DM: Ezekial, what do you think, for someone like yourself in your situation, the government should do for you?

TEM: I would like it if the government would at least give us some grants every month so we can live like other people.

DM: That's all the questions I have Ezekial ... is there anything else you wanted to say?

TEM: Yes, if we could put on record that government should give access to medication, free doctors ... I live in pain and I rely on tablets like Dispriin and Grandpa, which can only take away the pain for a short time and the following day it's back.

DM: Thank you Ezekiel.

AV: Thank you.

TEM: Okay.

MINUTES - 88:34

