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INTERVIEW WITH OUMA NGELELE

Dale McKinley (DM): Ouma, how long have you been living here in Rammolutsi?

Ouma Ngelele (ON): I started in 1956, but I started my work here in 2000, here at the shack.

DM: Tell us a little bit about growing up in this community ... you grew up here. What did you do when you first started working?

ON: I started working in 2000. I started with one child, Bongani ... from that year until now I didn't get anything from the community.

DM: I'm talking about before 2000 ... before this, what were you doing?

ON: I was a sales lady at Barnetts furniture store in Klerksdorp. I stayed in Klerksdorp until 1992 and then came here in 1995.

DM: So you were working mostly in sales until you came here. Are you married, do you have your own family?

ON: I've got only one baby, Busisuwe, the only child I had.

DM: Did your husband pass away?

ON: My husband passed away in 1995, but my child was born 2001 (laughs)

DM: For you, when the changes happened in 1994, when Mandela became President, when we got rid of apartheid ... how did you feel?

ON: From 1994, I'm feeling well until now. Because I see the changes – at the court we come all in, at the churches, at the schools and mostly in town where white and black people, we are together

DM: After the changes, what we you expecting for yourself and the community ... the kinds of things that were going to happen after that?

ON: I was expecting them to do something better life for our lives. For example, we are taking the orphan kids whose parents have passed away and those that are abused by their parents, to our homes.

DM: When you say the changes ... what kind of assistance were you expecting.

ON: I was expecting that the government must assist me to stay in a better house that I can stay with these kids ... there are about 18 kids, and I can't stay with so many kids in such a small shack. There is only promises but I get nothing up till now.

DM: What made you want to take start this (to take in orphans and abused children). Why did you do this ... for yourself?

ON: I got that from my parents, who used to help those that don't have. Me and my younger sister thought it would be useful for us to help those who are abused and those who don't have clothes, parents ... we must take them and stay with them ... Like every Wednesday I am taking clothes from the rich people and give them to poor people.

DM: When you started ... came back to the community here in 1995 (*should be 2002*), were there any places here available in Rammolutsi for those kinds of children – abused children, orphans ...?

ON: No.

DM: So there were no government homes, programmes ... nothing like that?

ON: No.

DM: How did you begin to identify the children ... the ones that you were going to help?

ON: I draft a constitution, a business plan and some registrations. The children are brought here by the social workers, the police and the magistrate.

DM: Do you have a name for this?

ON: It's Mohau Children's Home.

DM: When you started that ... did you make applications for assistance from the Department of Social Welfare for example?

ON: Yes I did, in Kroonstad.

DM: And what happened about that?

ON: They said to me I must wait, they will come to me ... but nothing has happened. Before winter ... I asked for the house and was told I was going to get a house in January - 2 RDP houses so we can make 8 rooms – but I have not gotten it.

DM: Why did you think they have not responded and you have not gotten those houses?

ON: Because they don't come here. The Mayor was here in April and she gave us sweets and fruits but up until now she didn't come back again.

DM: So you talked with her when she was here?

ON: We talked. She said, Ouma I see that you are so busy and that all the children they are so happy. She saw the kids doing their homework and baking etc.

DM: Tell us a little bit about the children that you have here ... what kinds of homes they come from, the ages etc.?

ON: I've got different kids heresome, they are coming from the poorest of the poor where they have no food, no clothes ... others are coming from the abused homes where the mother has got the grant money and takes it to go boozing and then comes back and beats up the kids.

DM: What are the age range of the children ...?

ON: I've got from 7 months to 15 years

DM: Do they all go to school?

ON: Yes, the ones who are old enough.

DM: Where do you get the resources to run this place?

ON: There is Baroto, there is KM in town – they give us bread and mealie-meal. Some children get the grant ... I must run up and down getting the birth certificates and registrations so they can live a better life

DM: It is difficult for you to get those things for the children?

ON: I use my surname for the children .. not all of them. I get the court order from the magistrate and then go to Social Welfare to get the certificates for the kids.

DM: How many children do you have now?

ON: 18 children – because I have another one now, a young one.

DM: 18 children and you stay in this 5 room shack?

ON: Yes.

DM: Donations from the community? You said earlier that you didn't get any support?

ON: No, I only got the support last year from the Sowetan ... food and school uniform

DM: How did you get the Sowetan newspaper to give you donations ... how did that happen?

ON: There is one man who lives in Saulsville .. he came here to visit us. He promised me he would write a letter to the Sowetan and he did that and the Sowetan came over and took photos and donated something to us.

DM: What happens to the children when they get older, when they leave this place ... what happen to them?

ON: There is no one who has left since 2001.

DM: And when the 15 year old becomes 18/19 – what is going to happen?

ON: If I am still alive and they are willing to stay with me then I will stay with them, they are used to me..

DM: Do you have any special relationships with the schools around here for the children? Explain that to us.

ON: For example, some of the kids here are abused and when they came here I ask them where do you go to school. And then I went to the class teacher and asked how he sees the kid when they come to school so I can counsel the child

DM: So you act as the counsellor for the children ... say many kids in Joburg who have been abused would be offered professional counselling for the trauma. ... do you do that?

ON: Yes, I do it.

DM: Do you have training for that or are you self taught?

ON: No I just do it, I pray to God to give me power so that I can speak to the child ... I wasn't trained.

DM: What is it like for you everyday taking to take care of 18 children .. what are the kinds of things you do during your day?

ON: They go to school in the morning and come back in the afternoon and then I check if there's any homework and if there's homework then I am assisting them ... then once homework is finished I start playing with them and chatting with them ... so that they can be closer to the people.

DM: Does anybody assist you?

ON: It's my sister only and the security man (my friend)

DM: Sorry, I did not get your name (*turning to other man in the room*)

Lucus: My name is Lucas

DM: And you are registered (as an NPO, children's home)

ON: Yes, we are.

AV: Do you get the child care grant for all of the children?

ON: It's only 5 of them that don't get the grant. This one who came in today is the fifth one.

AV: And the reason why you don't get the grant (for these kids)?

ON: At the Social Welfare Department they said we must get a house, a brick house. They said if it's shack like this then it's an ordinary house, it's not a shelter for the orphans and the abused. So I'm struggling to get even the bricks to build a home on my own.

AV: How much money does it cost you every month to look after 18 children?

ON: About R4 800.

AV: That looks after all 18 children and yourself?

ON: Yes.

DM: As a registered children's home, do you get any free basic services, like free electricity, water etc.?

ON: No, I have to pay like everyone else.

AV: What I'm trying to understand is that you are saying that the Department of Social Welfare is not giving you support but at the same time the police and the courts are sending children here?

ON: Yes, I can even give you the papers.

AV: Have you ever raised this with the department, to say but the police are sending children here?

ON: Yes, they know very well.

DM: I see that you are a religious woman. There are lots of churches here so what is the relationship between the home and the churches in helping you?

ON: The church that is assisting us is the Pioneer Church ... it is the white people's church. So in the township there is no one church that is assisting us. So this Pioneer Church, every month on the 15th they send us some food.

DM: So, yes Rammolutsi is a poor community but there are some people here with jobs etc ... Why do you think you don't get the support from your own community? Do you think that people don't care or that they just don't have the means to do so?

ON: I don't know ... but in Rammolutsi they look at your face and who you are/how's your life, So if you have a good life then they can assist you but if you have a bad life, are one of the poorest of the poor, then you can't get any assistance.

AV: Mummy are you getting sad now, speaking to us?

ON: I'm alright.

DM: You seem to be a very strong woman.

ON: Yes, I am strong.

DM: We talked about after 1994 and the things you hoped would happen .. changes, a better life. Now you've dealt with all these departments, so what do think is wrong or is there anything wrong with the local government, the councillors? Why do you think they are not able to assist you when they have the money there and the resources ... what do think the problem is?

Lucas: Most of the people here they look at where you are living ... this town is too small and its too poor. Maybe if you are living the Joburg life they will assist you but if you are living like the poor, they take you as living at the farms and they say people living at the farms are useless, they can help you and tomorrow you won't do anything better. So you use that money for yourself and not for the future of the children, for the future of the location, to give the location pride.

DM: So what you are saying it that you think the government doesn't think much of you?

Lucas: They don't think much about the poor, the people who are living at the farms, like this town of Rammolutsi.

DM: Do you get support from any of the farmers?

ON: No

AV: When you were growing up, what did you think you were going to do when you were grown up?

ON: I just had a passion for kids ... this thing has come out from there. You know when kids

are playing and they say, Mama, Papa like that ...

AV: I just want to take us a little but back now, to your story. You say you only started this home in 2000. Before that what were you doing?

ON: I was selling ... I had a small business selling paraffin, sweets and many other things.

AV: And how did that go?

ON: It was alright

AV: In 1994 you were staying in the community. What was it like here in 1994, what were people hoping for?

ON: We thought everything was going to be smooth. That people would get a better life, better jobs, better houses ... everything. But we can see that the poverty is increasing daily.

DM: When you look at your community and you say that you think you've been forgotten and there's increasing poverty. Who do you blame for that ... where do you think the blame lies for a situation like that ... is it with the people themselves, with government, somewhere else?

ON & Lucas: It's not government, it is people under government.

DM: When you say the people under government, do you mean people at the local level?

Lucas: The ministers, the councillors ... it is them who have got the problems because they don't serve people well. Government is not the problem because they give peoples money to give other people jobs, then they use for themselves.

DM: What do you think of your local councillors?

ON: They are the same, they are for themselves.

DM: Besides getting the house, what kinds of things would you like to see happening in this community, not only for the children, but for the community ... what do you think needs to be changed?

ON & Lucas: I would like to see people getting jobs/fighting poverty, have sports and recreation so that we can take the kids away from the street so that the rate of crime would come down. If people had jobs the poverty would go away. So it's where then a better life will start for all.

DM: What do you think the future holds for these children here ... when you look at the children you are taking care of, what do you feel about their future?

ON: I just want what's best for them. I like to ask them what do you want to be when you grow up. So I am willing for all of them to have a better life ... and also for their parents. Some children they can get parents so that can get a better life for them

AV: When you say some children get parents, are some of them adopted?

ON: No, some of them they still have parents but they have been abused by their parents.

DM: Do you have children that you can give back to the parents after awhile, when things

have improved?

ON: After about ... from 18 years upwards they can be given back to their parents.

DM: You have 18 children here but how many kids in this community do you think need this kind of care?

ON: Many

DM: If you look at all the children in the community that are orphans or are abused, how many would you say?

ON: Thousands ... they come and ask for food. Like yesterday, some came and I gave them food and shoes. When I look at the streets there are many kids who need help and a person who will look after them as I am doing.

DM: Do you have to turn children away?

ON: Yes.

DM: And that makes you sad?

ON: So much. Yesterday get a letter from one of the children and he's saying that if I'm not adopting him, he's going to kill himself. That makes me sad and I feel a pain about that child. (*crying*)

DM: I can imagine that it is a very, very difficult thing for you ... very hard work. We can stop there. We very much appreciate you talking to us.

AV: Just before we go, is there any message you want us to take away ... for all the people who are going to watch this, what do you want to say to them?

Lucas: We can say to the people of Africa, of South Africa that you must look after the child because the child is a gift from God. If you abuse a child you abuse God and the whole world will be damaged. So please people, look after the child because that child is our future, the next President for us. Take care of the children people.

AV: Thank you.

DM: Thank you, Ouma

MINUTES: 68:16

