

**The Alan Paton Centre
& Struggle Archives**



**RECORDING THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE IN
KWAZULU-NATAL**

Oral History Project of the Alan Paton Centre,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Interview with Busi Victoria Nyide
Conducted by Mary Kleinenberg
On 2 August 2005
In Pietermaritzburg

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The Pietermaritzburg Black Sash Advice Office

**BUSI VICTORIA NYIDE interviewed by Mary Kleinenberg
on Tuesday 2 August 2005**

Interview for the records of the Alan Paton Centre, University of KwaZulu Natal.

1. Where & when were you born?

OK – I was born in Paulpietersburg, on the 4th of June 1932. I was the last born of five, all four passed away and I was left alone. The three died when I was three years old and the fourth, my brother, died after I was married.

2. Where did you grow up and go to school? Tell us something about your childhood – important and significant things.

My father died when I was five and I was brought up by my mother. After my father's death we moved from Paulpietersburg to Pietermaritzburg because my mother was born in Edendale; that is where she grew up, and so she decided to come back home. My education was at Machibisa, a school called Hendryville, a Roman Catholic school where I went to primary school. And so, from there I went to Polela Institution, a high school, where I did standard seven and eight. After that I went to Adams College for teacher training – that was in 1948 and 1949. And so, I came back and started teaching in 1950, and the first school I went to was Mpolweni Primary School at New Hanover. After that I did my matric privately and passed.

3. Do you want to tell us something about your marriage and children?

I got married on 11 July 1957. You know, before I got married there was a request which I had in my heart. I remember, it was a Sunday when some of the lady teachers were braiding each other's hair, and I prayed to God. I said, "God if at all you will give me marriage, I am asking for a husband that will stay together with me until death us do part, and that we will always be happy together." And I said, "Lord, if this cannot happen please don't even try and give me marriage. I will not regret and will not say Lord where were you, I will just say thank you Lord. I wish my marriage to be a happy one in Jesus name, and I said amen." This was a prayer in my heart, and the other girls who were with me didn't even know that I was praying, and after that we just continued as girls, you know.

And so years went by, and then in 1955 a gentleman came to teach at Mpolweni, and this was Mr Nyide. I hadn't even met him before. He started telling me, you know the stories, he loved me, but I got angry because I didn't think he was the right person for me. Anyway, things went on. I remember the Afrikaans thing where all teachers had to learn it [the language]. After school we went to a high school where we had to learn it as students. Each time I took a seat he would come and sit next to me. At the end of the lesson I said "thanks Lord" because I didn't know the answers but he told them to me so I could answer as if I knew something, whereas I didn't. Anyway, the

relationship grew and we fell in love. He was just coming to teach for a vacation because he was at Fort Hare then, and he went back to complete his BSc. and the relationship grew up. So, in the following year, two years after [the first meeting] we got married in 1957.

[The tape does something odd now, but Busi and her husband had six children, two of whom died young. One daughter had cancer and a son was killed in a traffic accident.]

4. Do you think your children's life experiences have been different to yours?

Ya, it was different from mine. You know when we grew up we didn't have a choice of what to do, we were told it was either teaching or nursing, but with them it's their choice.

5. When did you start working for the Black Sash and how did this come about?

My husband got a job at the Edendale Ecumenical Centre and I wasn't working then because I was still bringing up a child. I can't remember who it was then whether it was Musa.

One afternoon when he got home he said to me that there was a job at the Black Sash. I even asked him what he meant by the Black Sash because I thought perhaps I was thinking of a different name. I knew the ladies who used to stand and protest etc. but I didn't know whether he meant that, and he said it was the very ladies who wanted someone to come and help them. I asked with what? He said with interpreting. I was surprised [laughs] that he was telling me and I had not heard a thing from them. He said he had talked to the lady who came to the Lay Centre asking if he knew someone who could help and he had mentioned my name. I said OK, I'll give it a try.

The following day he made an appointment for the lady to interview me – I think it was a Wednesday. Yes, I think it was a Wednesday the 24. in 1975. And so I went to the Lay Centre at about 9 in the morning, and when I got there I saw a strong lady, in fact there were two there, but only one came in to speak to me and that was Jane Voss. And so I sat with Jane and she asked me a few questions which I answered and then she said to me you know I am employing you now. I have got another interview with a lady over there, but I am telling you now that you have got the job even before I leave this office. I said Oh, thank you. She then said we should meet at the office in Thomas Street. on the first floor, I can't remember the room number, and she said we would meet there tomorrow at 9h00. She was with Carmel Rickard. [Jane and Carmel were Black Sash volunteers.]

And so, on the following day, I went to this place and I found both of them, and they said we would wait for clients to come in and tell us their problems. Well, that is how it started. I worked three days a week from 9 until 4, and there weren't many clients then – we saw three to four during those hours. And so it continued like that with the Unions next door, with their noise, it was COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions, formally known as Federation of South African Trade Unions). We had a good relationship with them really.

But, before we left those offices something really nasty happened. It took me time to forget about what happened and I can't even remember what day it was. There was this Moses Ndlovu who was a Union member who was detained that day. You could see the Special Branch [policemen] come in numbers just for one person, that was Moses. It was the first time for me to see that – my God – they came running with their guns – we were shocked, we didn't know what was happening, a bomb scare or what. They asked for Moses Ndlovu, who said who he was and they said 'Come and sit here and all of you out, out, out, out', and so we left. But, we didn't go home then, we went out and stayed on the verandah to see what was going on, but we couldn't hear what they said because they closed the door and then they talked to him. We didn't know what they were saying because we were not told anything after that. And so, after they had talked to Moses they left with him. I was shivering, I'm telling you, and I didn't know whether to come back the following day. I could phone the ladies and ask what has gone wrong here? That was something which really was not pleasing at all.

6. When did you retire?

I retired on 30 June 1997, having worked for 20 years.

Your long standing association with the Black Sash puts you in a unique position to tell me about the Advice Office in Pietermaritzburg.

7. Where did the office move to after sharing the office with COSATU?

From COSATU we went to the church [St Saviours Cathedral Hall in Commercial Road] which was just the Black Sash, not sharing with anyone. From the church we went to Ubunya House where there was PUMP [Pietermaritzburg Urban Ministry Project]. PUMP was the Pietermaritzburg ministry where there was this Moses Nshangase, the Rev. Nshangase. From there we went to Berg Street where we were with Peter Kerchhoff [PACSA – Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian, Social Awareness]. We worked so closely with Peter Kerchhoff, he was like a father to us; everything that went wrong it was Peter, Peter.....

8. What sort of work were you doing then and do you think it was important and, if you do, why?

It was important because communications were important. Some of the ladies I worked with struggled with Zulu so my presence made a difference. The work was problem solving because when people came to ask [for help] they were reporting 'I have been working for so and so and they have not paid me. They are doing one, two, three to me and I can't face him or her.' That is when we came in, to intervene, to find out what was going on, we wanted to find out both sides of the story, the employers and the employees. If you phoned people they would shout at you, but if you used the name the Black Sash, that very name changed everything, they would listen. The name, just the name the Black Sash did the trick.

9. Can you remember when the first Advice Office Co-ordinator was employed and who she was?

Yes, it was Pat Merrett. [Pat Merrett was never paid - always a volunteer]. Oh yes, it was Jenny Bowen. I can't remember who came after Jenny now. [I think it was Clare Kerchhoff.]

10. Can you remember any of the other volunteers apart from Pat?

Yes, Jennifer McKenzie, Juliet Hart, Jennifer Verbeek, Cara Pretorius, Ian Calder, Maureen Wright, not a Black Sash member but worked in the Advice Office, Else Schreiner, Fidela Fouche, Joan Kerchhoff, pointing at the interviewer, who says "and me" amongst some laughter.

11. When did you become a case-worker rather than an interpreter, and why was this?

I don't remember the year but by then the Black Sash had started to think I could do the job, and there were not so many volunteers then, and I could manage to do the job on my own.

12. Had other Zulu speaking people been employed by then?

No, I became a case-worker before others were employed.

13. Did you think the work of the Black Sash Advice Office changed over the years - if so in what ways?

No, I don't think it changed much because we were still doing the same things, cases. Oh, after that we did start going out to monitor pensions which really helped because when we got there the pensioners asked us to come every month. When we were there there was no chance of others taking their money. We couldn't do it [monitor] every month, but having the Black Sash at the pay points made a difference.

14. How did you feel when the Advice Office became more professional, run by the National Director, in other words when it was no longer run by Pietermaritzburg volunteers?

I am sure it did change because to know that you have an office, an overseer, made a difference to the employees. When people asked us where is your office you could say it's in Cape Town, we could boast about that, just like children. It was really a good thing.

15. Did the work change, and did the way you worked change? Do you think it was it for the better in your daily work?

It was for the better because it added something that we didn't do then. For instance, like voter education, something we had never done, but then through the office it was done. People used to come especially for that. We wanted to find out more [about our work]. Even to go out and meet people from other offices [doing the same work] that

made us refreshed because we learned different ways of doing things that we wanted to try.

16. Do you want to say anything about the queue education that went on in Advice Offices?

When people came in we spent 20 to 30 minutes telling everyone about things, like how to apply for UIF [Unemployment Insurance Fund] or how to apply for pensions and so it made a difference because we found that some of the people had their questions answered already in the queue and they just went away. So the individual interviews were about other things. It really helped.

17. Twenty years is a long time, do you think the Advice Office was delivering a different, perhaps better, service by the time you left?

Ya, I think so because when people came to us we used to... perhaps just find out what they are here for and they would tell us their problems. Let me just give you an example of a person coming to the office to collect his money, his pension. We used to advise that person how to invest his money and, if it was a pension, he should not keep it to himself, but make a will now whilst things go well, and also think about the children equally, girls and boys. One gentleman said to me 'you cannot tell me this because my son is a delinquent and so he misbehaves and I cannot give him anything.' I said, but he is still your son and if you say you will not give anything to this son and give it to the others, you are creating an enmity between the children and I don't think this is good, besides, you don't know what the future holds for all of your children. As time goes on the others might become useless and the one that you are withholding from becomes something, then what will you do? That gentleman came back to me to say, 'thank you very much for your advice because my son, the not good one, is now a minister of religion.' [Interviewer asks if she thinks she was able to give better and more advice as time went on and the answer was yes.]

And you know what, do you remember I told you about Moses Ndlovu, and that it was so scary, not knowing that it was coming to me years later when my son was also detained. In 1972 my husband came to fetch me from work, and when we got near home we saw a string of cars on the road and we thought, my God, what is happening? It was the Special Branch people again, at my place. They were in my bedroom, others in other bedrooms. I got into my bedroom and saw Dumisani was there and I asked why are you here and he said, 'quiet'. After about 45 minutes they left with Dumisani. Dumisani was working at the hospital then, and they said he had skipped the country, but was arrested somewhere. Fidela [Fouche] and Jennifer Verbeek knew about this and the Verbeeks said they would arrange for him to go abroad and Fidela said she would hide him at her place. It was another experience!

18. What are your overall feelings after such long service in this organisation – what are the most important things you gained from it, and what are the most important things you gave to it?

Well, I don't know what I left behind, but personally I gained self confidence. Even today I meet people who say I came to your office and you helped me. People came back to say they had done what I said and succeeded, and I said thank God.

19. Don't you think you left behind an example of dedication to the others in the office?

As I say each time I went to the office I would say to myself, God I know the people who are here are not visiting us, they are here because they have problems and they need help and they need somebody to respect them and talk to them politely. Every day that I went to the office that is what I had in mind. To treat them with dignity.

20. Is there anything that you would like to say from your heart?

OK, well I'm saying VIVA Black Sash, and continue the good work, and the battle that you started.