

## KWAZULU-NATAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

### INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY MUMSIE MALINGA WITH MRS ELSE SCHREINER ON 10 APRIL 1996

(‘M’ SHALL SIGNIFY THE INTERVIEWER AND ‘I’ THE INTERVIEWEE)  
(FIRST SIDE OF SECOND TAPE)

- 1 The tape starts midway through a conversation..
- 2 I: ...I Remember ...
- 3 M: Yes, and how..
- 4 I: and how...
- 5 M: Yes.
- 6 I: I had a friend who was the headmistress, the principal of Nichols School...
- 7 M: Yes..
- 8 I: ...who was a member of the National Council of Women, and I was a member of the
- 9 National Council of Women, and her name was Lucy Mthembu...
- 10 M: Okay..
- 11 I: And Lucy Mthembu and I worked quite closely together on - worked for the National
- 12 Council of Women.
- 13 M: You mean from - is Lucy Mthembu still alive?
- 14 I: No, no no, she died, um, many years ago - she must have died in the late 70's..
- 15 M: Okay...
- 16 I: And Daphne Tshabalala was appointed principal of Nichols School in her place.
- 17 M: Really?
- 18 I: And I can't give you the date of that, but Nichols School will have the dates and the ..
- 19 M: I'm quite sure it was 1963..I think.
- 20 I: Mmm?

- 1 M: I think it was in 1963 that she became the principal of Nichols School.
- 2 I: No, it must have been later than that...
- 3 M: Oh really, okay..
- 4 I: It must have been later than that. I met her through - she was involved with the National  
5 Council of African Women, the NCAW, and she was a member of NCW. And I was on  
6 the Committee of NCW, and my portfolio at that time was African Affairs - so that was  
7 one of the reasons why Daphne and I worked closely together - because she was my - my  
8 reference point.
- 9 M: Okay.
- 10 I: I was also involved, through NCW, in - in taking teaching materials and things to try and  
11 supplement the appalling conditions at Nichols School. So that's where Daphne and I  
12 met.
- 13 M: Okay.
- 14 I: We then worked together for a number of years, and um, that culminated when I was  
15 appointed National President in the National Council of Women - which was 1983..
- 16 M: Okay...
- 17 I: And I had to form a Board of Officers, I asked Daphne whether she would join the Board  
18 of - of NCW, the National Board, as a Vice-president. She wasn't terribly well and she  
19 was very, very busy, and in fact she accepted my offer of joining the Board, very kindly,  
20 but we agreed that she would not be able to attend Board meetings regularly, but at least  
21 she was there as a reference - at least she was there for meetings to see what were the  
22 Board problems and so on.
- 23 M: Okay...
- 24 I: She was an amazing woman.
- 25 M: Was she?
- 26 I: She only had one lung and when she was appointed Headmistress she was a thin, scrawny  
27 person who was often ill..
- 28 M: Shame...
- 29 I: And we thought the principalship of Nichols School would kill her, in fact she got

1 stronger and stronger. Her health improved enormously and I think her health improved  
2 because of her awareness of a need to drive - there was so much to be done.

3 M: Okay.

4 I: She was not only principal at Nichols School, she was also very active in the Methodist  
5 Church, she was very high in the South African Girl Guides' Association. Now I don't  
6 know anything about the Girl Guides Association, so I can't talk to you about ranks. But  
7 I know that she was very high, she held national office in the Girl Guides' Association,  
8 but the local Girl Guides would be only too delighted, I am sure, to give you that. And I  
9 know that she went overseas to represent the South African Girl Guides at overseas  
10 international Girl Guides things. Um, she had an amazing compassion, she had an  
11 amazing understanding - people who did things which would make me furiously angry,  
12 and I would want to discard, and Daphne would say 'No, no, no, you must understand  
13 what drove that person and try and analyse..' And she was remarkable in the depth of  
14 understanding that she had of other people, of their motives, of their intentions, and  
15 possibly the real nature of the people. You know so many of us look at what we see -  
16 Daphne looked right inside people.

17 M: Okay..

18 I: And we remained very close, right up until she died...in fact I saw Daphne probably two  
19 days, three days before she collapsed and died. She left, she left a legacy for everybody  
20 who knew her of what it really means to be committed to what you are involved in.

21 M: Ja, she was a great ? as well...

22 I: She never spoilt herself, or anybody else, but involved in a project with Daphne, you had  
23 to work as well, ? quite something. Um, but ja, she was very special.

24 M: So is that one of the reasons why you asked her to join the Board with you?

25 I: Ja, Ja.

26 M: Okay.

27 I: And she knew so much, she was - she was politically neutral as far as political parties  
28 were concerned, which is very important for a person who had such a wide influence on  
29 the community. But nobody could push her aside because their politics didn't match...Um

1           you know giving her a ? the most important thing about Daphne was her grip of the  
2           women.

3       M:     And you say that she was a close friend of hers - maybe do you have any like brief  
4           summary you can give me of her childhood? How was her childhood?

5       I:     No, I don't know about her childhood; her parents lived in Edendale, I knew them, um,  
6           but I don't know anything about Daphne's childhood. As far as our social contact was  
7           concerned, she had a wicked sense of humour, really wicked sense of humour and she  
8           could pull peoples' legs unmercifully and she and my husband - Professor Schreiner, had  
9           a very special relationship which you would see if you went to functions or if we went to  
10          - she came here for a dinner party or something like that. After a while you would hear  
11          shrieks of laughter from the corner of the room where you would find these two going at  
12          each other, hammer and tong, um, she had such easy graces. She was a very gracious,  
13          very gentle person, but underneath, inside, she was as tough as they come.

14      M:     Was she? Mmmm... oh - and I understand that she - she never got married?

15      I:     No, she never married.

16      M:     Why not?

17      I:     I don't know - she - she, she said she didn't think marriage was for her. Um, probably  
18          when sbe was younger, before she took on Nichols School, possibly she thought that she  
19          was so frail and so - and ill so often and she only she had one lung and often she seemed  
20          to be gasping for breath - perhaps she thought that she wasn't well enough to enter a  
21          partnership.

22      M:     Okay, ja...

23      I:     Um...

24      M:     But did she have any children?

25      I:     No.

26      M:     No, oh shame..

27      I:     No.

28      M:     Okay.

29      I:     She had no children, but she had Nichols Entrance School was an enormous school...

- 1 M: Ja...
- 2 I: An enormous school and everyone of those children was Daphne's child. I can remember  
3 sitting in her office at the school and every now and then the door would open and a  
4 couple of kids would come in just to show her something - you know - then run out again.  
5 And she was - she had such an easy contact with children and perhaps from the childrens'  
6 point of view, her concentration on the children at Nichols was more important than her  
7 having children and perhaps that fulfilled her mothering instincts which we all have. Um,  
8 she was a remarkable person in the imagination which it produced for that - what was  
9 then a dreadful school. The building was falling down, you'd go into a classroom and  
10 look at some of the books and wonder how long it was going to be before they fell on  
11 somebody's head. It was really a worn-out building and she couldn't get funds and she  
12 couldn't get funds, but she kept that place operative and cheerful and wonderful. The  
13 staff were marvellous, they adored her.
- 14 M: Okay, mm..
- 15 I: It was quite a place.
- 16 M: Was it a private school? You know was the school? when she was transferred?
- 17 I: I think it was probably a community school.
- 18 M: Oh, okay.
- 19 I: I don't ...? Baileys were on the Committee of the school and they were not and they were  
20 not at that stage parents because their children are much older - their children are now all  
21 grown up and married - the last one got married a couple of months ago - so I think it was  
22 probably a community school.
- 23 M: So that's why she couldn't get funds from the government.
- 24 I: Ja. so she would probably get a subsidy of so much per child but that wasn't very much  
25 and then we - we um, the National Council of Women built the Kwanamusa Nursery  
26 School in Sweetwaters..
- 27 M: Okay..
- 28 I: And we got funding from um, what's the foundation called? Urban Foundation, and then  
29 I tried to help Daphne get funding from Urban Foundation for the hall she wanted to build

- 1 at the school and so on. And eventually she made it, she got the money and the hall was  
2 built and it was officially used for the first time for her funeral service.
- 3 M: Okay she was a very likeable person..
- 4 I: Yes.
- 5 M: So I might go back to the point of her not getting married - did she have any love  
6 relationships with men?
- 7 I: I don't know, I don't know.
- 8 M: Oh, okay.
- 9 I: I should think probably not. She was a very religious woman.
- 10 M: Was she?
- 11 I: Um, she was a very conservative person in her behaviour, in her manners, and I think it  
12 would have been foreign to Daphne's um ethics, to have had an affair with somebody to  
13 whom she was not married.
- 14 M: Okay..
- 15 I: I guess.
- 16 M: Ja, ja, I see what you mean, okay.
- 17 I: Ja, she certainly - she certainly had many friends - both male and female but I - I would  
18 have been sure she never had an affair.
- 19 M: Okay. Thank you I think that's about it now.
- 20 I: Good.
- 21 M: Ja I'll just go to the other sources that you have generated for me now..
- 22 I: Okay.
- 23 M: Thank you for that...
- 24 I: Right oh.
- 25 M: Thank you very much.