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KWAZULU-NATAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 2 WITH BUNTY BIGGS, CONDUCTED BY PATE MERRETT ON 9 ~~APRIL~~ ^{SEPTEMBER} 1996

(‘I’ SHALL SIGNIFY THE INTERVIEWER AND ‘B’ THE INTERVIEWEE)

I: This is side three of the Bunty Biggs interview, talking about Black Sash. Bunty can you give us some reminiscences of the women involved in Black Sash in those early days?

B: Well, it's terribly difficult I think to divide out individuals - we were a very friendly group - I remember enjoying it - enjoying our times together - we the people that I think of most, I suppose, are Maimie, very much. I like her because she was not - she was quite willing to be sharp and and critical if necessary, but never in a condemning sort of way. She was very definite, she knew where she stood, she was clear, and she was always ready to have a good ding dong discussion. So she was - she - she didn't suffer fools gladly, I don't think - Maimie didn't. She tended to be a bit sort of straight and toss people off if she didn't think much of them, but she was a dear.

I: Can I ask you - did you find her one of the more radical members of the group?

B: Yes, I think she was definitely one of the more radical members, I think that she would have been less - less on the side of the kind of social concern aspect of things that Sash took on later on. She was very keen on the protesting, on the strong political angle and I appreciated that - I thought that was right. I thought that it was - it balanced up some of the less politically pro-active ideas that other people in Sash had. She and Meg were - were a very good mix and they were very close friends of course. Meg was so - was so gentle and was so always trying to think well of people - um - so generous in every way. And her home was really put at our disposal at any time - and to be used in whatever way we wanted and of course Kurt, her husband, was such an absolute poppet - I will never forget the way he always took his hat off to us as we stood in our stands and we walked slowly past us, taking his hat off to each one of us - I mean that was such a touch.

I: Marie ~~Dolan?~~ DYER

1 B: And Marie was - was - she was a very clear, very thoughtful - she thought things right
 2 through very straight - no faffing about, and came to clear, clear conclusions. Very on the
 3 ball - so she was also - and a very hard worker - she was - she was very - I remember her
 4 specifically because she and I used to take groups of school children out to Edendale to see
 5 just exactly how African children had to cope with school^s that were ill-supplied with
 6 equipment and with homes that were so bare and so minimal and we enjoyed doing that
 7 together. I think she was - I think it was her idea that we should organise that and so we did.
 8 And Tessa, of course who was right there from the start.

9 I: That was Tessa Weinberg?

10 B: Yea, it was Tessa Weinberg - yes, she was - she was more cautious, Tessa had a kind of
 11 moderating, I think, influence on - on Maimie's rather more forthright and outspoken,
 12 determined kind of ideas and plans.

13 I: How did they get on?

14 B: I think we all - we - you I think that we - there was a great camaraderie, I think amongst us.
 15 I think we all accepted each other as we were and didn't pay too much attention to
 16 differences because heather also - Heather Morkel, was also a different again. Rather
 17 incautious, sort of somewhat generalising in remarks rather than being specific. A very strong
 18 worker, active, energetic. And also a very valid member of our group. Those are the ones
 19 that I think of mostly but there were others - there was ^{Iris Friday} Alice Vrybie who was there and many
 20 others - I - we, we really - I think that we - we enriched each other in our different ways, and
 21 it was always good to be together. And then lots of other people came on afterwards, of
 22 course. I'm just talking about the early days now.

23 I: May I ask you - you mentioned at the beginning of Black sash that you appreciated the fact
 24 it was a womens organisation in a patriarchal society. To what extent had you experienced
 25 male prejudice against women, say in England, Germany or in South Africa, when you first
 26 came out.

27 B: Well, I don't think I had - before because I had moved in circles where there really wasn't this
 28 distinction. And in my work, I was in quite you know - jobs that were quite responsible jobs
 29 and I - I haven't actually ever worked - I don't think, under a man. I - in Germany of course

1 it was a team effort. So it wasn't until I came to South Africa that I actually - but looking
2 back - I can see that even in England, of course, that the male dominance was there - I just
3 hadn't personally experienced it until I got to South Africa where it was so obvious that you
4 couldn't - you couldn't not see it.

5 I: And did you find it a problem in South Africa? Did you find an irritant?

6 B: I found it not a problem, because when I was working at Edendale I always felt that I was
7 actually in a better position to tell the men what to do when they were - um - but I think I
8 found it - I found it a drag as much as anything, I think. I found that it was a penalty that the
9 whole of society was having to suffer, because women were simply not given their due
10 recognition, and were not given the chance to operate in ways in which they could operate.
11 Sash of course was special from that point of view and I was glad that there were no men
12 there quite frankly.

13 I: Men could be associate members, but not full members?

14 B: Men, later on, it sort - to begin with they weren't even associate members - later on they
15 could become associate members but that was - it was - it wasn't really - it didn't really work,
16 I don't think because I don't think that men appreciated being associate members. And they
17 didn't have a function. They - I think most women can talk to Sash with their husbands and
18 probably in a sense they had an input that way and I'm quite sure that there were certainly
19 men who were very supportive of Sash, both legal and in the political field who were advisors
20 and who gave us good sensible advice and opinions so that we benefitted from that - but In
21 think - I don't think they ever came into the structure in any meaningful sense.

22 I: So you actually enjoyed working in this all - womens' group and you didn't find that there
23 were any particular tensions that were a problem?

24 B: No, I don't think so - I don't remember finding any particular tensions..

25 I: Maybe that affects your whole optimistic and tolerant nature?

26 B: I don't know really...

27 I: On the subject of the advice offices can you remember the - if there was any debate in the
28 'Maritzburg group about whether or not there should be an advice office?

29 B: Yes, I think that probably in 'Maritzburg reflected the general debate that was going on in

1 Black Sash throughout the country and we certainly did have differing views on this - I think
2 personally I - because maybe I came across so much of the social problem through Edendale -
3 I was involved, very much involved with the advice office and spent regular sessions there
4 every week and was - was - felt that this was a very important part of our work simply
5 because it brought us to the cutting edge of what the political problems were as well. Now
6 others I think felt that we shouldn't just hive off and become concentrated on the advice
7 office, and I agreed with that, I felt that the - that the political presence and the position that
8 we took publicly was as important and I think that on the whole in 'Maritzburg we managed
9 to continue with both aspects - both with our political protests and political education and the
10 literature that - that was produced, and at the same time be more social in nature of our work
11 - which came through the advice office.

12 I: What was your attitude to the stands the Black Sash used to hold?

13 B: Well, I was a keen supporter of those for - for several reasons - to begin with I felt that it was
14 important that the public should know that there were people in the community who felt very
15 strongly about these issues. Now, obviously passers-by who read posters are not going to
16 have a sudden kind of Damascus experience and become convinced of one thing or the other -
17 but at least they could not say that there was not knowledge and a witness against what was
18 happening in the country which was unfair and not right. So that from that point of view I
19 felt that it was important from the public's point of view. From a personal point of view, I
20 wanted to stand up and be counted in how ever simple and ineffective and unimportant, or
21 where I wanted my voice to be heard and that was one way that it could be done and I think
22 that from the point of view of the - of the people who were not White, who were passing up
23 and down the street - they also could see - well at least there's a handful of people who think
24 that we are not getting a square deal and who want things changed, and that also was
25 important.

26 I: Now you were involved in stands in the 60s and 70s - can you remember any members of the
27 public being particularly aggressive towards you?

28 B: Well, no not really, they left the odd stink bomb and there were various sort of toilet rolls
29 were thrown at us and people shouted at us and people called us names and said '?

1 ? really.' I think the thing that made us - made me feel somewhat uncomfortable was the
2 inevitable photography that went on by the Special Branch and one knew that somewhere
3 your - you were ticketed and docketed in some way in some archives and that gave a slightly
4 uncomfortable feeling - but one got used to it really.

5 I: Bunty the final question I posed was how significant you think Sash was - obviously you can
6 only talk about the period up to 1980, you have mentioned the all women aspect and how
7 significant that was - are there any other comments you'd like to make about how important
8 you think Sash has been in the history of South African political protest?

9 B: Well, it's awfully hard to know how significant Sash has been, because I think one needs time
10 to pass before one can really tell - but I think one or two things come out - I think it's been
11 significant in the sense that it has - it has educated, it has matured a strong organisation and
12 strong group of people whose opinions are now seen to be valid and who are now able to
13 walk into commissions, into government offices, into Ministers to get interviews and to put
14 their point of view - and in fact that point of view is now being sought. That's an amazing
15 achievement really - I can't think of any other womens organisation that has reached that kind
16 of authority that Sash has reached so that is good. I think it also has probably - although this
17 is hard to assess, has probably given other womens organisations, a kind of pointer to what
18 they can also achieve - I mean there are other - must be other womens organisations that are
19 cropping up all around the country that are seeking their own identity their own authority -
20 they may not come to Sash and say 'well tell us how you did it.' But at least Sash has
21 demonstrated that it can be done so that I think it must have been an important influence in
22 womens' identity and in womens' capacity to influence events throughout the country. But
23 I think it has also - it has given the women themselves, the women who were part of Sash,
24 it has given them and educational pathway to their own development and their own maturity
25 and their own significance and I think that's been tremendously important.

26 I: Thank you Bunty.

27 I: It's the third of September and we are continuing with the Bunty Biggs interview. Bunty
28 from 1961 to about 1978 you were involved in the banishment issue - this was the banishment
29 of African opponents to isolated areas in terms of the Native Administration Act. It's not a

1 well-known aspect of apartheid policy. So your involvement in the committee to help the
2 families is particularly interesting. I understand that the ANC asked Helen Josef and Lillian
3 Ngoye to set up the Human Rights Welfare Committee. Did you know Helen personally?

4 **B:** Yes, I didn't know her immediately and I can't quite remember how it was that I actually got
5 involved with this but I certainly did meet her on the occasion when she had a brief period
6 when her banning order was - had run out and before a new one was imposed,...

7 **I:** That was in 1962?

8 **B:** That was in 1962, right. Okay. And she came down then and visited all the groups that were
9 involved with the banishment of these men and spent a day or two in Pietermaritzburg and
10 really put us in the picture about what it was that she hoped we would do and the reason why
11 she was involved with this. I was really very taken with her as a person - she was very - quite
12 humble really, not at all somebody with a very forceful personality - when I say humble I
13 suppose in really mean that she had a humility about what she was doing although it seemed
14 to us to be something - in view of her previous history that was very courageous and she was
15 getting involved with a group of people who were under very severe restrictions by the
16 government and therefore one could assume that those who were - got themselves involved
17 with this work would also have to be very discreet and careful and to think that she had only
18 been a short time free from her own restrictions and immediately got on with the work of
19 helping those who were so penalised by the government and were forcefully removed from
20 their - not only from their homes but from their whole family district - this struck us as being
21 really very outstanding. So we saw her on that occasion and I think she came down again -
22 but I can't remember the date - thereafter we kept in touch with her discreetly - and by letter
23 she kept us informed of the addresses of these families. And then subsequently I kept in touch
24 with her - I 'phoned her when I was in Johannesburg and we wrote regularly each year to
25 each other until she died. I would say that Helen came across to me as someone who was
26 utterly dedicated to the people with whom she was involved and whom she was concerned
27 about - although I wouldn't call her exactly a powerful person - she was very strong - utterly
28 ready to do what she could - calm - not the kind of person who would make hasty decisions,
29 or rush into ill-advised actions. Very aware - sensitively aware of the situation of the people

1 that she was helping and anxious not in any way to jeopardise their security or to make
2 conditions worse for them - at the same time - determined - great determination to do
3 something about the position and the circumstances that they were suffering - I think that she
4 had an attractive personality. She certainly attracted me as a person, I felt that she - I was
5 somehow in tune with the way she saw things and what she was trying to do and it was - for
6 me - it was an important person to get to know. With regard to the other people who were
7 active on this committee - I think that they were - as far as I can remember, mainly the same
8 people who were involved with the 'detainees' Committee during the period of the
9 Emergency, but in addition I remember Marjorie Flemming as a very active member - she was
10 one of our local Quakers - she was - had been a journalist - she was retired by now. She had
11 been a journalist - I think on the Natal - I'm sure on the Natal Witness - she wrote quite a lot -
12 including poetry. She had also been one of the leading feminist active workers during the
13 Suffragette Movement in South Africa, which I think probably didn't take off very strongly -
14 not in fact as much as it did in England for example. But in the papers that we saw when she
15 died, there were certainly articles by her on the need for women's activity in the community
16 and she was a good - a good writer, she certainly was very active in this help with the people
17 and the families who were banished and remained so until the Committee came to an end in
18 1978.

19 I. What exactly did your committee do?

20 B: Well, we were guided really by Helen Josef as to what we should do and how we should go
21 about things. These families were removed from their homes and placed in areas that were
22 arid, barren and often very far from any kind of village or people who they could turn to for
23 help. So they needed practical support, as well as personal support in the knowledge that
24 there were others who were concerned about them. We had to be very discreet because we
25 didn't want to embarrass the families and cause more trouble for them by their being involved
26 with maybe so-called subversive activities from people living in the White areas - so called
27 White areas, but what we tried to do was to send them money - through postal orders - which
28 not always got there - because the postal areas in these areas was really pretty awful. In
29 addition to that we sent them food and clothing which on the whole did actually get through.

1 We weren't allowed of course to raise money publicly but we were able to tap people who
2 were concerned and who were prepared to help and so we were able to keep them going with
3 gifts of money. We did try, I believe at one time - to visit one family - most of the ones we
4 were concerned about were moved into the areas of KwaZulu - but not the areas that were
5 easily reachable - these were areas that were far from any transport facilities, and we in fact
6 didn't ever actually get there to get to see them - but Helen did and her main purpose when
7 she was freed from being banned was not so much to visit us but to get around to all the
8 families before she was banned again - and this of course she did manage to do and wrote up
9 in her book.

10 I: So she was the main source of information about these people - to your committee?

11 B: She was the only source of information..

12 I: She was the only..?

13 B: ..yes, apart from the occasional letter that we did manage to get from the families confirming
14 that something had arrived and telling us usually of the rather miserable plights that they were
15 in. But unfortunately I don't think that any of this documentation such as it was is around.
16 I can't really remember what happened to any reports or any records that we kept. We
17 obviously were a bit concerned ourselves about the fact that we were not exactly *persona*
18 *grata* with the government in the work we were doing and so we had to be very discreet and
19 we were conscious of this and therefore put as little on paper as was necessary so I'm not
20 sure whether there are any records around - I wouldn't even know where they were.

21 I: Buntj, from 1962, until 1981, when you finally left South Africa, you were very closely
22 involved in Kupugani - could you tell about its origins and its aims?

23 B: Well, in 1962, the media reported that there was a surplus of milk being produced in the
24 country and that this was literally being poured away and other agricultural so called surpluses
25 were also being disposed of. Now Neil Alcock was a farmer who lived - had a farm near the
26 Polela Health Centre and he was - apart from being a producer of milk, he was horrified at
27 the waste that this showed and so he thought the best thing to do was to try and distribute this
28 - these so-called surpluses among those people who simply couldn't afford it - so he spoke
29 to a few of us and explained his ideas which were mainly really just to get hold of the

1 surpluses and distribute them in the African areas - well he met with a good deal of doubt and
2 hesitation and cold water was poured on the idea - it was impractical and it wouldn't work
3 and how could we organise it and so on, but Neil was a very determined character - he was
4 quite a forceful man - he liked rather getting his own way and he persuaded us rather
5 vigorously to give it a go. So we started with these twin objectives. Oh, I should add that
6 at the same time as all this food being thrown away there were reports in the media of
7 widespread incidents of TB and Kwasakor, especially amongst African children. So we had
8 this bizarre situation of food being destroyed and yet an increase of sickness as a result of
9 inadequate and proper nutrition so we had these as two twin objectives. the distribution of
10 protein and other nutritious foods, at a low as low a price as would be possible - as well as
11 distributing that food that was gifted to us because it was surplus and this was to be combined
12 with a process of health education. So we started in Natal - actually in Pietermaritzburg
13 because Neil himself was close enough to be able to - to give us his advice and his help and
14 we set up a committee of people - of concerned people and we started. We managed to keep
15 the price of the food we sold at a very low level - in other words highly competitive against
16 the prices that were in the shops, by buying in bulk and then re-packing into selling units. We
17 relied heavily on voluntary workers - we had people of all ages - from school children through
18 to pensioners and we sold from the one selling point to start with - which was in
19 Pietermaritzburg. Now gradually this developed over the years - we moved several times to
20 bigger premises as the - as our work grew, we then used whatever contacts we had elsewhere
21 - for example in Johannesburg, in Durban, in east London, in Cape Town - those were the
22 next centres that were developed to promote Kupugani and health education became an
23 increasingly important part of our work as we moved out of the urban into the rural areas as
24 well - this was done by getting vans to take food to certain points on certain days where the
25 health educator would give talks and demonstrations and food would be available for sale.
26 Now Neil Alcock didn't stay with the organisation all that long, I can't remember exactly
27 when he left - he was certainly the very active energetic forceful moving spirit in the
28 beginning, but Neil really was the sort of person who worked best on his own initiative
29 without other people particularly committee who were - had ideas of their own, and who

1 were prepared to make comments and be critical and be assessing of the way the work should
 2 go and how it should develop, and so he wasn't an easy person really to involve in something
 3 which increasingly became organised - had to be efficient, had to be clear in its objectives and
 4 in the way it worked and which increasingly involved other people and it was important for the
 5 work to go forward for other people also to make their contribution in the way that they
 6 thought was right. So after a while, Neil who started off as one of the main organisers and
 7 who went around the country sorting out where food was available and arranging for it to be
 8 transported - whether it was potatoes from the Transkei or whether it was oranges from Natal
 9 or whether it was vegetables, or whatever, gradually we realised that it would be best if Neil
 10 went off and did something else on his own - and I think he recognised this to be fair to him.
 11 And so he left the organisation after I would think about three years, and then moved to his
 12 own farm at ^{Marai Rackettes} Marai Rackettes, I'm not sure quite when he went there but it was certainly I
 13 think after he married ^{Opina} Krina - because during this time of the involvement of Kupugani his
 14 own marriage was nearly falling apart and I think this was also quite difficult for him to cope
 15 with. Because Kupugani gradually developed really quite quickly we had to regularise its
 16 position and so it became registered as a limited company - the Nutrition Corporation of
 17 South Africa Limited - not for gain. Now it wasn't a charity it was a business in a sense so
 18 we couldn't go to the public and ask for donations to support our work, we could, I think,
 19 and I think we managed to get support for our health education work but that was not very
 20 substantial so we actually had to balance our books and we were able to do this basically
 21 because the work was carried out by volunteers. It was the volunteers who came to re-pack
 22 the food - it was the volunteers who came to sell the food and of course the committee was
 23 made up of volunteers, so the number of people in the early days who actually drew a salary
 24 were very few, and we were able to get accommodation at that time at a reasonable price in
 25 the city - in mean that was accommodation for packing and selling. Now in due course of
 26 course, this whole ^h thing developed enormously. Amongst other ^h things, the food that we
 27 distributed and sold also altered. In the beginning it was mainly soup powders - protein soup
 28 powders, milk powder and the particular food that we really promoted at that time was
 29 ^{P.N.} pronutro. This was developed - I think I remember, by a Swiss biochemist who was

1 employed by Hinds and we felt this was a very, very good food because it was a balanced
2 food and it had a high protein content, but it wasn't known at all and it had to compete
3 against all the fancy cereals that were sold by the shops, but gradually pronutro In think took
4 off quite well and later on - although we were still able to sell it below the price - the shop
5 price, it did increase its sales through the shops, and interestingly people used to come in and
6 say they wanted it to buy for their cat and their dogs, but we rather drew the line on that one.
7 Now I've already said about the voluntary workers really that were the absolute backbone of
8 the organisation without whom we simply couldn't have managed to go or to develop to the
9 extent that it has developed today where we're selling - our budget is something - or at least
10 our sales are something in the region of over a million rand. Now from the beginning we had
11 a committee that was also very hard working and I would certainly like to mention Les
12 Wynberg in that connection, because he was there from the start and he is still there today in
13 1996. Elsa Schreiner came in later as a manager of the Pietermaritzburg for several years and
14 did a great job in getting it more efficiently organised and the office properly run in a way -
15 before it had been a bit haphazard, so she made notes for contributions. And then eventually
16 we had to get more and more managerially and well-clued up on the business side and so we
17 employed someone who had that kind of experience and In think she stayed with us for about
18 twenty years.

19 I: Who was it?

20 B: Yes, it was Roma Pridmore, who started with Kupugani as a bookkeeper in 1972 and very
21 quickly became first of all a regional manager and then a national manager - I should perhaps
22 explain that we had a national executive with members from Cape Town and East London
23 and Johannesburg and Durban as well as Pietermaritzburg because the whole organisation had
24 exploded to the extent that it had become nation-wide and of course this brings its own
25 administrative difficulties and responsibilities with it. So that gradually we had to become an
26 efficient streamlined expert business otherwise we couldn't have managed to pay our way.
27 Gradually it became clear that this nation-wide organisation was a bit cumbersome and rather
28 hard to handle and difficult to have the same kind of approach and the same priorities
29 throughout the country and so the organisation in Cape Town and Johannesburg hived off and

1 became their own organisation doing their own thing - separate from our Kupugani as
2 Nutrition organisation of South Africa and we retained simply the work in Natal.

3 I: From 1968 you became involved in Black Spot Removals issues, particularly with regard to
4 Maria Ratchetts, Roosboom and the resettlement area at Lime Hill. Who else was involved,
5 and worked with you?

6 B: Well, we had a committee that as far as I remember used to meet mostly in Durban.
7 Archbishop Hurley was on that - the Anglican Minister in 'Maritzburg - Ken Hallows, and his
8 wife, Joan, were involved, Peter Brown was there - I think Tony Matthews and there were
9 others. The Churches had quite a lot of church land, in fact Maria ^{1/2}Rachettes, as far as I
10 remember belonged to the Catholic Church and they were - I think - becoming aware that
11 they had not paid sufficient attention to their development of their church land for the benefit
12 of the African families who were living on it. So they were also actively involved with this
13 work of Black Spot Removals and we met to see what we could do in practical ways to
14 improve the conditions of the people who had been forcibly removed and we started off with
15 Lime Hill - In think we also got involved with other areas - but I can't remember at the time -
16 of course Peter Brown had been concerned about this problem for a long time. And I think
17 that his contribution was very important. The impact of the new theology at that time - I
18 think - began to have an influence in the churches and they were beginning to feel more
19 responsible as institutions to grapple with these kind of problems such as the removals and
20 Lime Hill was a practical example of what could be done. Of course the other person who
21 was very involved, was Cosmos Desmond, in the Catholic Church who then wrote a book
22 about the whole ting later on and suffered, I think as a result of his involvement because of
23 course he had to leave the country rather rapidly. I forget what date that was..

24 I: Bunty, in 19 - in 1968, you wrote two reports on Lime Hill - the 27th of February and the 13th
25 of August. Copies of which you've lodged with the Paton Centre. Did you feel that those
26 reports had any practical effect in terms of what you were trying to achieve?

27 B: Well, to be honest, I doubt really whether they did. The point of - one of the points of the
28 reports was that I wanted to discuss the whole thing with the officials who were at that time
29 in Graymore House and I thought that it was best to send them a report first before I actually

1 met them. Well I spent about I think I recall nearly three hours at Braemore House? with a
2 range of officials - about 4 or 5 - including the Bantu Affairs Commissioner to go through
3 the points that I was trying to make and to see whether something couldn't be done to make
4 the Lime Hill areas more reasonable and more acceptable as a place to live for the indefinite
5 future. I don't think any official - I don't think I expected any official to say 'Well, yes. Mrs
6 Biggs, we quite agree with you - we think that this is very important and we'll see what we
7 can do.' They just don't work like that and I don't think that I felt particularly despondent
8 but they hadn't reacted in a practical way. To say that it made any impression on what
9 happened afterwards I think is really not possible to decide. They did, I think do some things
10 from the point of view of the health, they did help put in some help for people who were aged
11 to dig their pit latrines, they did put a nurse in a clinic in place, they did try, I think and do
12 something about improving the bus service, from Lime Hill to Ladysmith to make sure that
13 people could get to work or at least get to the places, the offices and so on. They did also
14 build a school, a primary school for the local children that was a reasonable standard but I
15 would never claim that the reports and my interviews with them made really any difference -
16 they probably intended to do this anyway.

17 I: Well, possibly they were combined with the whole public clamour against what was going on
18 in Lime Hill...

19 B: Yes, there was certainly publicity - both from people like Cosmos Desmond who was active
20 and those of us who were trying to get the churches to make more of an impact through their
21 involvement with the church agricultural project and the fact that they had church land on
22 which families lived and so there was a certain amount of publicity in the press, but to be
23 honest, I don't think that press publicity was all that great. I think the issues were fairly minor
24 as far as the national press was concerned - the Natal Witness I think was - gave it some -
25 some air. But really, I don't think that press publicity is a great public mover of conscience
26 in South Africa at that time.

27 I: Now you also conducted a couple of surveys in Lime Hill - how did you do those?

28 B: Well, in a rather amateurish and haphazard fashion, because In had never done anything like
29 it before and I of course didn't have the knowledge of Zulu

1 I: Side Four...

2 B: But although I could not speak Zulu and didn't understand very much, there was a very
3 helpful nurse who was attached to the State Health Clinic which had been started and she
4 helped me with interpreting. My contact with the families was actually rather limit...

5

6 End of First Side.

7

8 Second Side.

9

10 B: ... that I sent, and which I referred to earlier. I have kept in some touch with the work of
11 CAP through Denis Hurley but as I was not really a member of any of the churches that were
12 involved with that particular work I didn't really follow their activities a little closely.

13 I: Presumably other Black Sash members joined you in these visits to Lime Hill?

14 B: I - can't really remember...who from the Black Sash was involved. Where are we at now?

15 I: From about 1974 to 1981, you were involved in the PMB Independence Conference, how did
16 this start?

17 B: Well, as far as I can remember I got a phone call from Phyllis Naidoo, who was a lawyer in
18 Durban who had been particularly concerned with human rights issues and she asked whether
19 a group in Maritzburg could look after the detainees who were taken in by the State and who
20 needed support help and monitoring. So I contacted a few people - as far as I remember there
21 were about eight of us on the committee - I can't remember who they all were - certainly
22 Peter Brown, Lesley Wynberg, Lionel Abraham, and Maimie and Rabie Motala were on it.
23 We met as a just a group of people and started to see what we could do to assist in particular
24 the current case that was on in 'Maritzburg which was called 'Harry Gwala plus - I think -
25 Ten others.' At that time we were really called ourselves the Detainees Support Group as far
26 as I remember. But after a while it became clear that we needed some better umbrella cover
27 for the work that we wanted to do and the South African Council of Churches got themselves
28 organised into giving us the kind of help and the kind of authority that we felt would be useful
29 so we affiliated to them and I think we called ourselves the Pietermaritzburg Committee for

1 Dependants' Conference - or something like that and certainly we tried to get one or two of
2 the local church ministers and I think Ken Hallows and there was another minister who In
3 think was from the Congregational Church who worked with us.

4 I: Did you ever meet Harry Gwala personally?

5 B: Yes, I have know Harry Gwala for a number of years - I think I first came into touch with him
6 when we - our Black Sash Advice Office started their work in the same room as the Trade
7 Union Office - in those days the trade unions were not recognised with any legal authority but
8 they were allowed to function and Harry Gwala was a very active trade unionist. In fact he
9 had been really victimised because of his trade union activities. Now In visited Harry Gwala's
10 family - I think when he was first put in prison - this was actually before this case of 1974,
11 he'd been in prison for a stint before that I think or he had been detained or something and
12 I went to see his wife, Alda, and her children, they lived at that time up in Georgetown - that
13 far end of Edendale valley. I was very fond of Alda, she was an exceptionally fine woman and
14 I visited - them - or her - on several occasions. I didn't keep in touch with them so much
15 when Harry got back and the next time I was involved with him was over this particular case
16 of the detainees. After he came out of Robben Island because of his motor neuron diagnosis,
17 I went o see him in his house in Dambuza Road in Edendale really because by that time he's
18 lost Alda. In had kept in touch with her on a fairly regular basis and she died of asthma which
19 had been a long time sickness and disability that she put up with with great courage and she
20 died in Cape Town during a visit that she was making to Harry. So I wanted to visit him and
21 just talk to him and I was moved really by his acceptance of this very serious incapacitating
22 disability that he had and his determination not to let that be the deciding factor of what he
23 did with his life. The house had been made much more reasonable in the meantime - because
24 a donation of money from overseas had enabled Ala to put electricity into the home and so
25 he was able to have appliances which were fitted there for his use and which enabled him to
26 cope with this disability. I only saw him one other time when I went to the ANC offices in
27 'Maritzburg - I think it was 1993 and went really just - just again just to greet him because
28 although I know he was a difficult man and I can understand how people got fed up and
29 frustrated and irritated, I think that he - he had led a life of real dedication to his cause and

1 he continued to do that in the face of very serious handicaps which he must have known were
2 going to have a continuing effect on his life and would end it before too long. And so I felt
3 that I just wanted to say hello and embrace him - which I did - in front of a group of his
4 women committee who were all sitting there and they were having a big discussion. I think
5 about - about the women's work for the ANC in Pietermaritzburg. And I was glad that I had
6 seen him because he died soon after. It doesn't surprise me of course to learn from others that
7 Harry really had a side of him that was extremely hard to cope with and that other people
8 could fall foul of him and that he could ride rough shod over other people's decisions or
9 wishes or opinions. I think it's very difficult unless you can get really close to somebody to
10 understand how if you feel you have a mission in life - which I think he did feel very strongly,
11 that all else takes second place, his family also suffered as a result of this. Alda really held
12 them together. They lost, I don't think they ever knew what happened to their oldest son
13 Marx, he certainly wasn't around for the years that I was in touch with the family and Alda
14 didn't know where he was. I think the daughter, Lulu also suffered as a result of not having
15 clear parental guidance and authority and of course she ended up losing both her parents and
16 had to somehow cope with the needs of the other younger children. So it's a - in many ways
17 it's a sad story but it's a story that I think is understandable in its context. With regard to the
18 actual way that the Dependants' Committee functioned, there were various things that we tried
19 to do - there were the poisoners themselves, the detainees, who were detained for a long
20 period of time and in this case, with them, we took food to the prison, change of clothing and
21 what other things that they felt they wanted and which were allowed by the prison authorities,
22 money was donated privately. We couldn't of course make public appeals but we did get
23 money from the South African Council of Churches, their Dependants' Conference section,
24 and we also managed to get help via the Defence in Aid, which was established in London
25 after it had been banned in South Africa. Now they through the activity of their committee
26 and Kevin Collins? was of course one of the prime movers, managed to get families in other
27 countries to sort of adopt one or other of the families of the detainees, so we were channels
28 of money, food and clothing, etcetera, coming from overseas to these families and that was
29 an enormous help. I remember particularly at the beginning of the year when schools

1 reopened money coming basically to provide education for the children and was very
2 welcome. I was not so much involved with that part of it - I did most of the home visiting,
3 I tried to keep in touch with all the families by calling to see what their problems were - what
4 their needs were and then reporting this back to the Committee. I think we met probably on
5 a weekly basis - certainly to start with. We tried to help the particular needs of the families
6 that were removed - I remember that in one case the wife really became quite mentally ill and
7 we had a great difficulty in getting her to the hospital at Fort Napier for treatment - she as
8 very unwilling to go - but fortunately she was staying at the time with the sister of her
9 husband who was a very calm, balanced, helpful person and who had a certain authority over
10 Violet and together we did manage to get Violet Qwaba to Fort Napier and she had periods
11 of treatment there that I think were quite helpful. I remember another wife who gave us
12 considerable food for thought and activity because she really didn't I think altogether
13 understand that we were trying to help her to become more independent and to stand on her
14 own feet by getting training. We did in fact get her to go to the local techⁿ in order to get
15 some kind of secretarial training which she did sort of do in a rather haphazard kind of way
16 and we also tried to help her to get some kind of work sewing clothes; she somehow and I
17 can't remember quite how got involved with the Security Police and they took her in for
18 questioning - she was the kind of person - as I think I've indicated that wasn't really really
19 wanting to cooperate with anybody very much and one couldn't altogether blame her for that.
20 However, we did get news that she was admitted to Edendale Hospital under rather strange
21 circumstances and that she had been seen with a heavily bandaged head - that made us
22 suspicious and we got information - via one of the clerks at Edendale Hospital - whom I had
23 developed a relationship with through the work at Edendale Child Welfare and he looked up
24 the file and said that she was in for a head injury not some other kind of complaint. It was
25 around about Christmas time and I was very worried that this kind of information was going
26 to get back to the family who were being looked after by I think a cousin of Mavis. So on
27 the spur of the moment one day I decided that I would go to the Special Branch in Loop
28 Street and ask whether Mavis could go back to the family at Christmas time just to at least
29 reassure them that she was still alive and okay. I told Maimie what I was going to do and just

1 sort of a back up and it - was interviewed by a Colonel - I can't remember his name - he was
2 later removed - he was later moved up and he went to Port Elizabeth and told him what I
3 wanted him to do - that I felt that this was only reasonable and that family were very worried,
4 and it was Christmas time and she was obviously - had obviously been injured somehow and
5 would he give instructions for her to be allowed to visit - he was more interested in why I was
6 asking this and on whose behalf I was asking it than he was on the reasons why I was asking
7 it. However, after about half an hour of just talk and really trying to open his mind to a bit
8 of Christmas charitableness, he said 'well..' he would see what he could do. And in fact she
9 did visit - she spent Christmas day with the family - plus security personnel hovering on the
10 outskirts and at least the family were reassured that Mom was still alive and so I felt that had
11 been a worthwhile effort. The other thing that we did was we monitored, as best we could,
12 the - the case as it continued. This wasn't very easy really to follow because we had to sit
13 obviously in the area for visitors which I think was upstairs in the Supreme Court building and
14 the procedures seemed to be conducted by us in hoarse whispers the whole time and
15 everybody mumbled and it was very difficult to follow who was saying what and why the
16 questions and what the answers were. But I think that our presence, although it wasn't
17 always continuous, at least gave a kind of support - both to the families who were also there
18 and to the detainees as they paraded in each day and sat in a row listening as best they could
19 to the procedures.

20 I: Before we get onto our final questions, Bunty, could you just mention briefly your
21 impressions on Buthelezi in the early days and how those impressions changed?

22 B: Well, if we go back to the 1960s, we had slight contact with him I think through Neil Alcock
23 - either as himself or as part of Kupugani - in the time when Buthelezi was absolutely
24 resolutely refusing to cooperate with the government over making - turning KwaZulu into an
25 independent Bantstan. And he seemed at that stage to be very anti-apartheid and quite clear
26 that what he wanted to do was to develop KwaZulu along the lines of being a area or a
27 province, or something similar which would do the best it could apart from being an
28 independent country. In other words he was having to accept, up to a point, what the
29 government was forcing him into - but he didn't go the whole way. He was - as a result of

1 this - I believe penalised by the government when it came to a gift or offers of help at times
2 of difficult - whether this was at harvest time when he was refused the loan of tractors and
3 mechanical things for work on the land - which was available to the other Bantustans and so
4 on. He was, it seemed, putting up a fight on behalf of the more acceptable attitude the rest
5 of us had that South Africa must be one country and not divided up into bits. Now at the
6 same time, he was also promoting Zulu culture and history. He, I think was a very proud man
7 - he felt very strongly of his position in the community and as a result of a contact I had made
8 with a German friend, who got to know him in other ways which are really not very relevant,
9 we were both invited to the launch of Inkatha as a cultural organisation - this took part - this
10 took place at the Kwamashu - some time around 19 - end of 1960s - I should think - but
11 maybe we can get that date verified and the whole thing was really stage managed, there were
12 thousands of people gathered together in this big stadium. The officials were on a platform -
13 and that included my German friend and myself - much to our embarrassment really and
14 Buthelezi launched an impassioned description of what Inkhatha was intended to be and he
15 gave us a copy of the manifesto which was quite a substantial document which we looked
16 through while he was talking and at that time it didn't seem to me at all exceptional - it was
17 describing how the people - both the youth and the men and the women - each in their own
18 way - with their own organisations were going to develop themselves as people with a
19 culture, with a concern for community - with a concern for morality - for family values. The
20 whole thing was absolutely clear that if this was a call to the Zulu people to take pride in
21 themselves and to me it was a sort of counter-balance against the whole of the government's
22 attitude which was busy devaluing people and making people of - of other ethnic groups of
23 less value than the White people. And to that extent it seemed to me to be a very useful thing
24 for the Zulu people to be working at and hopefully that it would have a constructive and
25 positive effect in the community. The fact that it didn't work to like that of course could not
26 be assessed or even dreamt of at the time when this manifesto was first presented to the
27 people and was very enthusiastically received - they all lined up, paid I think their one rand
28 to become a member. Each group - individually - first the young people and then the women
29 and then the men - all in their particular type of uniform. I think they had some sort of

1 uniform, and they were - the whole thing was acclaimed with great delight and enthusiasm
2 and I thought that there's nothing wrong with that....

3 I: So what went wrong?

4 B: Well, I think what went wrong was this whole question of control, of power, of - of realising
5 that that - on Buthelezi's part, that it - that the Inkhatha idea of being a culturally based
6 organisation couldn't really stand up to the cutting edge of the political thrust and the political
7 development that was happening elsewhere - and in fact to take Edendale as an example - we
8 found that the people of Edendale did not really lap up the idea of an Inkhatha as a cultural
9 organisation, really with any great enthusiasm and we didn't see any evidence of it in any
10 work amongst the youth or amongst the womens' organisations. In fact the church based
11 organisations in Edendale were much stronger than the development of the Inkhatha based
12 womens groups. So I think that really um - whether Buthelezi right from the very beginning
13 was using this as an introduction - a kind of gentle easing of the way into making a much
14 stronger and more vigorous, and in the end, violent organisation, I have no means of
15 knowing. But certainly it - it didn't stand up against the - the - active thrust of for example
16 the youth elsewhere in the schools because Buthelezi, as we all know, denounced the schools;
17 uprising in 1976s, and I think also he needed to keep one foot in with the government. He -
18 he didn't feel strong enough, I think to stand out and be penalised by - by government actions
19 so he went softly on the sanctions issue which is where he broke ranks with other people with
20 whom he had been on reasonably friendly relations in the past. So it all came unstuck, I
21 would say within three or four years of that initial launch at KwaMashu as a cultural sort of
22 cement that would hold the Zulu people together.

23 I: Have the recent revelations of the connections between the Security forces and Inkhatha
24 come as a surprise to you?

25 B: No, not really, no, no. I think once Buthelezi went for the power base he didn't have any
26 moral ground on which to stand against that - he didn't have a - any kind of structure that
27 would support him - so once you've not got that to work on or to work from - you go for an
28 alternative I think and his alternative was to work then rather secretively - but not so
29 secretively that it didn't all come out in the end, with the government forces in order to

1 strengthen his own position which was being weakened by the lack of support in the urban
2 areas.

3 I: Do you have any personal reminiscences of Winnie Mandela?

4 B: Yes, I do - when she moved, or was moved to Brandfort - I forget - I think it probably started
5 maybe within the Sash group, but I wouldn't be too sure about that. Anyway Maimie and I
6 decided that we needed to - to take action - to take some kind of action on that. We got
7 details of where she was - that wasn't difficult to get - we also got details of the lawyer whom
8 she was in touch with and who was really her advisor - she had to have a lawyer and she was
9 allowed to have an advisor and he was the only one in town and he was Afrikander. So we
10 got that information and I can't remember, I'm not sure whether Maimie and I first made the
11 journey or whether I - no I think - In think my husband David and I first went to see her on
12 route to going to Lousivale - North West Cape or something like that...and we took with us
13 a carload - we were on our own - we took with us a carload of - of food and all sorts of
14 things - plants for the garden and you name it and we - we informed the lawyer that we were
15 coming and would it be alright - could we meet at his offices. And he said 'Yes, that would
16 be alright.' And so we did that and it was an extraordinary meeting really because she didn't
17 know us and I had not met her before In don't think and she came in very vibrant, well
18 dressed. full of life and she gave us both a huge hug and we all sat down - three in a row on
19 the sofa and we talked as though we'd known each other for years. That was the first
20 meeting. I think Maimie and I went another time and it was the same time we met again at
21 the lawyers. Um, I can't remember exactly what we talked about - all sorts of things I expect
22 - she just wanted to know what was going on and we wanted to know how she was and how
23 her - what life was like at the - in this township. The second time I saw her was with my
24 daughter, Francis and we sat I think in our car just outside the township and she came and
25 talked to us there. By that time all sorts of things had been going on - I think she'd lost her
26 job with - or she had lost her chance of a job with a local doctor who'd wanted to employ her
27 as a social worker and had applied for permission and then he had suffered a car accident on
28 the way to seeing her and she felt sure that this had been arranged - that this wasn't a real
29 accident and she was very very disturbed and troubled about that. I visited her a couple of

1 times at her home- I got permission from the local manager of the township to go to her
2 house - which I did. And saw her home and the sort of conditions in which she was living -
3 that was the first time and she took me to a distribution Centre which she was using as a - a
4 distribution Centre for food parcels that were sent to her through Operation Hunger which
5 was being run at that time - as I - my ...The details of about what I saw on which visit are a
6 bit confused, she was also running a creche in the garden for small children. She'd, she'd
7 overcome the really very strong suspicion that she'd met when she first went there, word had
8 got - or had been put around that she was a dangerous person that she was something to be
9 avoided and that anybody who was caught seeing her would be in trouble - that sort of - those
10 kind of threats and it had taken her a while to work through that and to win the respect and
11 the support and the sympathy of the local people. She also had in her house, a library - books
12 that people came and borrowed and she also had a cupboard of medicines of various kinds -
13 I mean not sort of prescribed medicines but the usual kind of things and she had, through an
14 organisation in Germany, she had acquired a sort of ambulance and this ambulance was used
15 to take people to - from clinics and hospitals until it was burnt out and that again was - well
16 she suspected reasonably that it had been a sabotage attack. So she had a lot to put up with -
17 but she also - oh and there was one incredible incident when she - now this was another time
18 I visited her and she told me how she'd got a very septic leg and so septic that she had to be
19 taken by a hospital - the hospital in - had to be taken by ambulance to the hospital in
20 Bloemfontein where she was seen by the specialist who was concerned and who said she must
21 be admitted to hospital but she couldn't be admitted to that hospital because it was only for
22 Whites, so she would have to go to some other hospital somewhere else that was for Blacks.
23 Well, she wasn't having that - so she into her wheelchair and she careered, apparently down
24 the passage - I could just see it all happening - out through the front gate to the utter
25 amazement of the ambulance people who were there still and they said 'well what's going
26 on?' and she said 'well I'm not going to some pokey old African hospital, if you won't admit
27 me to the hospital here where I can get the proper treatment, I'm going home.' Well there
28 was real fear by that time that it was going to go gangrene and that she was going to die, and
29 so everybody - all the officials - I'm sure this all been written up - all the officials started

1 telephoning and working on what could happen, and in the end she was flown to
2 Johannesburg to a private nursing home that was willing and prepared and able to take in
3 Winnie and that's where she stayed until she got better and then she came back to Brandfort.
4 I mean that is the measure - one measure of the kind of character that she had - but on the
5 other hand she had a sense of humour - she was able to just shrug things off that weren't
6 important - I remember I knitted her a blanket in the colours of the ANC, it was really quite
7 a nice blanket and I took it to her and she had it on her bed and her daughter liked it too - so
8 her daughter took it off and so then I had to knit her another one - and it went on to her bed
9 and the Special Branch came and saw this and decided that it was subversive and they took
10 that one away. But fortunately soon after that some American visitors came with Helen
11 Suzman and they presented her with a beautiful quilt that had been made I think in
12 Philadelphia of the local stories of what had gone on - what had happened in the life of the
13 State of Philadelphia - and so she had that on her bed - so that's a good alternative. So she
14 was a woman of very very mixed - as a sort of qualities. Difficult, I have no doubt, brave, I'm
15 absolutely sure, courageous, thoughtless for herself at that stage. I think my feeling is that
16 things started to go awry when she was - when she left Brandfort and she was absolutely -
17 I think right in refusing absolutely refusing to go back to Brandfort after her house was
18 torched. There was no question I think that it was torched and I think then things started to
19 be difficult. It's one thing to be persecuted, and all the qualities that you need to keep
20 yourself above depression and despair and a sense of non-worth which must be the kind of
21 thing you have to struggle with - coping with that requires qualities of a different character
22 from coping with being really one of a community that needs a different kind of leadership and
23 a different kind of set of values. And I think that things started to go awry when she was
24 back in Johannesburg - then all the kind of adulation, the Winnie as being the First Lady of
25 the ANC, or whatever - some people thought of her. .

26 I: 'Mother of the Nation...'

27 B: ...mother of the nation, absolutely, yes - that was absolutely not the best thing for Winnie and
28 I think that really, in a sense, things started to go wrong then. I think I agree with a comment
29 that Rampaela Mampela made about her when she was over here once and somebody said

1 'what did she think about Winnie?' and she said words to the effect that Winnie was one of the
2 tragic disasters - or it was one of the tragic wounds of - of the Black people that had been the
3 result of - of the huge amount of anguish and stress and anxiety and fear and persecution that
4 she had been put through - probably more than any other woman in the country - and I go
5 along with that - I think that one has to draw a line at that point and say Winnie became
6 somebody different. Bu^t the fact that she had a history of the other Winnie is something that
7 I shall always remember

8 I: Were any other Quakers in 'Maritzburg as active as you in welfare and political work?

9 B: Well, the one who was most active as I recall - was Marjorie Flemming about whom I have
10 already mentioned. The other - when you've got to think about local Quakers - there were
11 a mere handful of us - only about half a dozen, two of whom were involved with government
12 jobs and I think that in those days people who worked for the government felt very doubtful
13 and insecure about getting involved in active political work simply because that would have
14 jeopardised their work. But I was always fully supported in what I did. Nobody ever said
15 'Bunty, calm down - don't throw yourself around so much - just take it easy and - because
16 we don't want to be -we don't want to be tagged ...' Never was there anything like that - they
17 all said 'Go ahead we support you.' So certainly I felt supported and wrote letters on behalf
18 of the Quaker group - not giving the names of people - but as from our Quaker meeting we
19 wrote letters both to the press and to government about things that we were concerned about.

20 I: And were you not also involved in the national Quaker organisation?

21 B: Oh yes, I was - I was for a time - the what is called a clerk of the Quakers nation - country
22 -wide so that I was responsible in a sort of administrative capacity for arranging our annual
23 gatherings and at those gatherings also statements were made and representations were made
24 to the government about matters that we felt strongly about that they should consider
25 changing or taking action on.

26 I: Right. in all the organisations you've worked for - which gave you the greatest challenge and
27 which did you find the most fulfilling?

28 B: Well, let me do the fulfilling one first because that's really quite easy - I think that - that must
29 be the Edendale Welfare Society for these reasons really - it was the one that I was involved

1 with the longest. It brought me into close contact with African life and this was a huge plus
2 for me because I was able to experience a culture, a community, a way of life that was so
3 refreshing and so creative and so different from - from the more individualistic, intellectual,
4 In might say, economic, kind of pressures and guidelines that one had from a sort of western
5 European kind of background, so that this was something that enabled me to get a better sort
6 of grip of what South Africa as a country was all about. And also I made friends with - with
7 people living in Edendale - I didn't make African friends of anybody living in Pietermaritzburg
8 because I didn't really meet them there with any kind of close, individual sort of contact so
9 this was also important. Then the other thing was that I think our work in Edendale although
10 it started in a fairly limited sort of way, expanded and grew and developed sort of side shoots
11 which is always exciting and rewarding. For example, Padmero started off under the
12 Edendale Welfare umbrella, as did the work of the birth control clinic which we started in
13 spite of a lot of cold water that was poured on it and which also developed a life of its own
14 and then the work and development of the Ecumenical Centre.

15 I: End of side four.

16 I: The

17