



David Ralikhomo and
Andronica Nthuthe

A working couple

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Making and decorating a shelter from waste

David Ralikhomo and his partner Andronica Nthuthe have also furnished and decorated their shack at Metro Centre with found objects. David says there is very little there that was not found. Look he says' the sunglasses over the bed, the teddy bear, the clock, the mirrors, the bags, the buckets, all the bedding, the tyres and boards we use for the table. And all the building material – corrugated sheeting for the windows, plastic sheeting, floor boards, pressed wood, metal sheets, everything.' Of the framed 50th birthday poem he says, 'My wife bought that for us in the year we both turned 50.' The couple have lived here for 4 years. They've made a private courtyard stoep in front of their shack. And they cook just beyond that on braziers fashioned from large paint buckets.

Radiographer turned reclaimer

David talks of his work on the mines in the Free State town of Welkom. 'I was a radiographer. We tested the pretties of metals using radiation. We did liquid penetration testing to ensure metal parts did not leak. We worked on boring machines, jumpers and other machinery used in the mines. But the car industry also used our services. When the mine shut down David searched found work as a technician in Alrode, close

to Johannesburg. That company closed in 1996 and David returned to Welkom to search for work. He also went to other mining towns. Wherever he went he was told he was too old. Eventually he came to Johannesburg and started doing recycling work. He built trolleys from wooden pallets. 'Those days the municipality used to take our trolleys', he says.

Living in Fietas

He was living 'on the street' in a suburb when a friend brought him to Fietas. There were other reclaimers there and David stayed on. It wasn't much safer except that he was amongst reclaimers. He constructed a makeshift shelter on the street alongside other reclaimers. He adds, 'JMPD [the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department] would often take your stuff, take the good things for themselves and burn the rest they burnt peoples personal belongings. One day I came home and all my stuff was gone. If we were there when they raided, they would swear at us. They hit another mama who was there. I left Fietas and found another place near a tennis court. But even there we were evicted by JMPD. So I came back.' That's when he met Andronica.

Andronica – growing up on East Rand

'I grew up in Natalspruit', Andronica says. She was a young woman in in the late 80s/early 90s years of extreme violence on the East Rand. Her parents were ANC cadres and their family was under threat all the time. Her 27-year-old brother was shot dead just outside their home.

Andronica left school when she got pregnant. After her daughter was born, she found work braiding at a hair salon. Later on, she worked as a



cleaner in Germiston. But when that work ended, she was out of work for a long time. 'I decided to come to Joburg to look for work'.

The meeting

David interrupts. 'Her friend bought her to Fietas. She was beautiful and she spoke Sotho.' David and Adronica soon fell in love. She visited every Sunday. And after some time, they decided to live together.

Living and working together

David taught her about reclaiming and now they both do this work, collecting, transporting, sorting and selling. He introduced her to his clients who keep materials for him in some suburbs. And she made her own contacts too. When they go to suburbs that are further away, they leave at 4.30am. On Tuesdays, when they work in Brixton, they leave at 6.30 am. They walk to and from collection sites 'I don't ride the trolley like I used to be able to,' says David. He also talks of the perils of pulling a large load along the roadside, 'A car hit my trolley once and I fell and smashed my knees. The car drove off'. They say it's good to live close to where materials are found, but it's more important to live close to a buy-back centre because once you've sorted the materials the loads that have to be taken to the buy-back centre are very large. And you need to be able to sell often to have enough money for food and basics. The couple walk together, David pulling and Andronica pushing the multiple carts and filled bags that they take to the buy-back centre.

David remembers the day that ARO brought them to Metro Centre. 'It was the day before Easter. JMPD had told us to go to hell. We met with Mr Eli of ARO. They brought us here'.