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Early in '87 one of Frontline's editors dropped a primary-school child at her home in Soweto, not far from Winnie Mandela's house. His reception was extremely chilly. This was out of keeping with Soweto norms, and indeed African norms.

It turned out that the adults had a big grouse about the Press. They were being dropped in the cart, they felt, by a Press too scared to acknowledge the "oppression and tyranny" they were subjected to. What? The entire press was thick with Apartheid's oppression and tyranny. No, they didn't mean that, this time. So what did they mean? They got tongue-tied, as if there was something that could not be spoken. Lots of riddles, about a gang that thought it ruled the neighbourhood.

Frontline's man asked **Nomavenda**. She replied in writing. The day after this edition appeared, the papers were full of one element of her story, the house. Another element, the football club, took rather longer to become household knowledge. Its ripples have stayed a lot longer.

Watching Winnie

An unsuccessful attempt to ask Mrs Winnie Mandela certain questions leads to an unexpected experience.

By Nomavenda Mathiane

For months there have been questions asked by Soweto people regarding Mrs Winnie Mandela, and *Frontline* has been seeking to put these questions to Mrs Mandela for her replies. One question is about Mrs Mandela's view of her status as "Mother of the Nation". Most people take it for granted that Mr Nelson Mandela is President-in-Waiting of South Africa and people are happy with that. Even people who do not necessarily support the ANC look up to Mr Mandela and view him as the embodiment of black aspirations. At the same time many people have become uneasy that Mrs Mandela is taking her role as "First Lady" too heavily. They want to know: is she still an ordinary mortal at heart? Some people are also not at ease about her being treated as spokesperson for organisations from which she carries no mandate.

The other category is the activities of the Mandela Football Club. Some events have taken place at Mrs Mandela's Phefeni home, and people ask whether it is certain that these are fair beyond any doubt. There have also been cases where the Football Club is alleged to have claimed special rights to facilities which other people were using. Further, there have been cases where people allege they have been disturbed by members of the Football Club. In one,

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a man's car was confiscated, only to be returned when a delegation saying they represented Mrs Albertina Sisulu called at the Mandela home to discuss the matter with the Football Club.

While people are sympathetic with the suffering Mrs Mandela has been through, and are very much in support of her stand for liberation, there are many who seek answers to these questions.

Lately there has been a new source of discussion, that is the huge house which is being built for the Mandelas in Beverley Hills. People ask why is there nothing about this house in the newspapers? They ask whether this is to be a State House, or in whose name is it owned? They ask where is the money coming from?

The house is by far the grandest house in Soweto and people are divided over it. Some say it is right that the future President should live so, and others say that is wrong for leaders who represent the poor to live like kings.

After numerous attempts to discuss these and other matters with Mrs Mandela, including futile waits at arranged places, *Frontline* went to call on Mrs Mandela at her Phefeni home.

It could be an ordinary house in Soweto except for the number of people who come in and out, boys milling around and the number of cars parked outside.

It's a cottage-like house with a garden - lawn and creepers climbing the pre-fabricated fence. The house has taken, change since Mrs Mandela has come back to it. It is homely and warm, a in cry from the days when she was a Brandfort. Today, her touch can be sea all over the place, immaculate and posh.

Walking into the tiny dining-room one stumbles against the heavily tiled table and tall elegant chairs. The walls are wood-paneled up to the ceiling. Making the room look even smaller is a sophisticated security gadget complete with a television screen. Immediately one senses the security consciousness. ,

The secretary walks in and moved the screen between the living room and the dining room. Young people are seated on brown leather settees. They beckon the secretary and they all walk out. THE unspoken word is - what do you want here.

On one side is a piano with a few ornaments including a poem on the lady of the house with an imprint of be portrait. One wall is occupied by musical gadgets and tapes. The rest are filled with African ornaments that remind one of an Operation Hunger warehouse.

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The secretary walks in and says that “Mama’, as she is fondly referred a around there, is not in, but can she help us. She asks “What case is it’ - She promises to get in touch with me soon.

I never heard from her and come Sunday, we call again. This time the boys are in the football club uniform. There are people moving in and out. It’s like a wedding.

At first Mrs Mandela didn’t seem happy to see us. Zinzi, the daughter, explained that her mother treated Sunday as family day and never attends to business. But the house was full of people. By this time I was not taking no for an answer considering how I have been trying to get an interview since last year.

She relents to seeing me for not more than 15 minutes but we should meet at the Cosatu rally at Jabulani Amphitheatre. We know the meeting has been banned, but went to jabulani in case she knew something we didn’t know.

There was nobody at Jabulani but the Casspirs. We drove back to Winnie’s house.

When we got there, she was very apologetic for the wild goose chase and offered us some lunch.

Having eaten, she told us she had to go off to Zondi to solve a case and wondered if we could accompany her. We didn’t mind since it would offer an opportunity of talking to her as we traveled. But unfortunately we had to follow her kombi which was full of the Mandela FC players. This turned out to be some ordeal because of the stares she attracts.

We stopped at a very humble house in Zondi and were welcomed by an old man who could be over 70. The seats were taken by the football players. The photographer and myself had to share a seat.

The plaintiff, a girl of perhaps 19 carrying her three-year-old son, sat next to the defendant, the old man. Across the table sat Winnie Mandela, prosecutor and judge, with her assessors, the footballers or comrades as they were referred to during the trial.

The girl was a relative of the old man. She had come to Johannesburg at the old son’s expense and the old man had seen her through schooling and when she fell pregnant, the old man and his wife looked after her.

It appeared as though she had for some reason been moving in and out of the house and when the old man reprimanded her there had been a quarrel,

and the girl went to appeal to Mrs Mandela.

The proceedings went on a very respectable note with the old man referring to Winnie as “Madam” and in a soft voice Winnie questioned the old man. He was tongue tied. He kept biting his lips and settling his spectacles that kept falling.

At some stage he said “I may have said nasty things, but Ntsiki (the girl) knows that I sometimes drink, so I may have been drunk.” One of the boys raised his hand and Winnie said “You want to ask a question comrade?” The boy asked the old man how often he drank liquor. The old man said quite often. The boy wanted to know if the old man was in the habit of saying nasty things when drunk. Silence in the court as the old man shakes his head, looks down for a long period and says: “I find this very hurtful that I have lived with you Ntsiki for so many years and treated you like my own child and when today we have a difference you call a gang for me.”

There was mumbling in the house and Winnie halts the noise by calling the old man to order, saying once more in a very soft manner, “Tata, you must never call these children a gang. They have their homes and names. They are the ones who are putting things right in this country. I am told that you said nobody can do anything to you because you are a councillor. We don’t care for that type and it is that very system which we are fighting and we will not tolerate that type of language in our homes.”

Winnie asked the girl what she wanted done. She said she was no longer prepared to stay at that house. The boys were then asked to help her with her luggage. Her items were carried out to the kombi where throngs of people stood watching. Some openly on their fences, while others peeped through the windows, worried that something fearful might take place.

When all the parcels had been taken out, Winnie stood up to go and the old man saw us off. As we walked into our car, I wondered what the people who saw me there think of me. How were they to know that I am only a journalist, just there to report back to the people. To them I was part of that group and as one woman remarked as we were driving off, “Where will all this end?”