

Nontsikelelo 'Ntsiki' Biko (nee Mashalaba)

Nontsikelelo 'Ntsiki' Mashalaba was born on 9th May 1946 in Libode District close to Mthatha in the Eastern Cape. Her Father being the Principal at the Rainy Mission Primary School and then subsequently at the Dininkosi Primary School at Corana, near Mthatha, she was enrolled at both of these for her early schooling. She continued her studies at Mthatha and at Buntingville Secondary School where she completed her junior certificate, later enrolling at Shawbury Senior Secondary School where she matriculated. Ntsiki did her nursing training in General Nursing and Midwifery at King Edward VIII Hospital in Durban.

As her career progressed, Ntsiki obtained additional qualifications, including a Diploma in Advanced Nursing Science through the University of South Africa (UNISA) and obtained Certifications in nursing specialties by studying part time from both Grey Hospital (geriatric care and HIV/Aids counselling) and Dora Nginza Hospital Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha) (primary health care).

In 1966, while in training, she met the leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, Bantu Stephen Biko who was a medical student at the University of Natal. When she was asked about her relationship with Steve Biko she replied: *"I must say, he was very politically involved then as president of SASO... and somehow I fell for him"*. Three years later, in 1970, the young couple married and had two children, Nkosinathi and Samora (named in honour of Mozambique nationalist leader, Samora Machel). Mrs. Biko was further blessed with a daughter, Bulelwa Lindelwa, in 1988.

In 1972, when her husband was banned to King William's Town, (now Qonce) Ntsiki and her family settled in Ginsberg. She struggled to obtain a she managed to get work at St. Matthews in Keiskamahoek. She was posted there until 1977, when she left due to pressure exerted by the Ciskei Government and worked for two months at All Saints Hospital, eNgcobo until Steve was arrested on 18th August 1977 and subsequently killed by the Security Police in September. Ntsiki was unable to work until 1981 due to the inquest into Steve's death, other related court cases and the perpetual interference of the security police.

Ultimately, Ntsiki obtained employment at Grey Hospital in King William's Town where she was on staff until 1999 when she was boarded off due to injuries sustained in a serious car accident. Even here, however, the authorities intimidated the matron so as not to associate with her. Working with stern resilience, Ntsiki continued to be a champion of community-based activism - a distinct trait of the approach of the Black Consciousness philosophy - upholding the Biko family name and preserving Steve's legacy.

During this time, Mama Biko as she came to be fondly known, focused on community work, with her passions directed towards education and healthcare. She became member of the Ginsberg Civic Association and a Trustee of the Ginsberg Education Trust which would later evolve into the Zingisa Trust Fund; assisting impoverished youths to access education opportunities through bursaries.

Mama Biko spearheaded the establishment of the Steve Biko Foundation, together with her son, Nkosinathi. In the years between 2005 and 2012 Mama Biko was actively involved in the conception and creation of the Foundation's Steve Biko Centre, opened on the 30th November 2012. The Centre is now her primary base for her continuing community activism and she participates consistently in programmes at the Centre including public dialogues, book launches, exhibitions and performances.

Since retiring from nursing, Mama Biko, has undertaken a number of endeavours, even establishing her own company in 2002, Khanyisizwe Catering and Equipment Hire. Her working life was spent in the public health field, serving the people and communities with a tenacious spirit and sincere dedication. It is largely through her steadfast service to the community that she has consistently expressed her activism. As a dynamic and well-grounded community practitioner, some of her former roles as a community activist have included:

- Secretary of the Star of Hope, a Rugby Club in Ginsberg,
- Secretary of the Ginsberg Civic Association,
- Vice Chairperson of Sosebenza Sonke Women's Development Organization
- Chairperson of the King William's Town Retired Nurses Association (Nightingales).
- Patron of the Donald Woods Foundation in the United Kingdom

- Patron and Trustee of the Steve Biko Foundation

Mama Biko's life is a testimony to her enduring commitment to community-based activism, grounded in the ethos of the Black Consciousness philosophy. Her legacy and impact is felt, not only by those who interact with her on a daily basis in the township of Ginsberg where she continues to be an inspiration, both to the young and old, but also the wider Eastern Cape and South African communities.