

MRS CLARA XABAMATRON: ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL AND MEMBER OF THE INKATHA CENTRAL COMMITTEE

A TRIBUTE BY MANGOSUTHU G BUTHELEZEI
PRESIDENT OF INKATHA/KGARE

THE GOOD SHEPHERD CHURCH: KWAMAGWAZASATURDAY 21 APRIL 1990

I have known our beloved sister Clara - XABA (nee MASEKELA) for more than 40 years. I first met her when she was a trainee nurse at the Victoria Hospital, in the Eastern Cape. I was at a time a student at the University of Fort Hare. I have never forgotten what a dignified lady she was even then when she was in her youth. This meeting between us was always a source of mirth whenever we reminisced about those days. We met at the Beacons Cinema in Alice. Students at Fort Hare named the nurses at the Victoria Hospital in Lovedale - Blue Bottles with white stoppers - because of the uniform they used outside working hours - of navy dresses with white berets. A friend of mine suggested that we should go to the cinema in Alice, he had a partner who will also bring some company for me as well. My friend was of course far older than me. As it happened the company he meant was our beloved sister Clara. I always teased her about this meeting to the end of her days by recalling that she looked me up and down as if to say: "Small boy have no ideas - as you have no chance". We always enjoyed this joke whenever I reminded or told others about it in her presence.

She of course later married someone who was related to my late mother, the late Albert Xaba who was a well known educationist and was Principal of Bhekuzulu College when His Majesty the King was a student at that institution.

Mr Xaba was a wonderful human being who was liked by almost everyone who knew him and this included the late King, King Cyprian Bhekuzulu the

father...../2

father of the present King. So it was very often that we saw Mr and Mrs Xaba. They also came to MAHLABATHINI to visit their sister - Mrs Natalie Nxumalo, and her husband the Honourable J A W Nxumalo.

I remember her days as one of the very first Matrons at the Vryheid Hospital. This was rare on those days and what is more Vryheid has always been a place where you are made to remember your colour because of racist attitudes that one encountered there over the years. So in this sense our sister was a pioneer and blazed a trail as it were for other black girls who became Matrons after her in various parts of the country. She did this with great competence and dignity. She did it in a manner which made one proud to be black like her. I was also a close friend of one of her brothers the late BIGVLAI MASEKELA with whom I corresponded over the years.

Our friendship blossomed into a warm and close one over the years and she became a member of Inkatha and it was such a privilege to serve with her as a member of Inkatha Central Committee when I appointed her to that body. She was a great patriot. She was a fighter for the dignity of the black person. She was a relentless campaigner for human rights and the human dignity of the black person. She fought this battle at every level in her work situation, in her involvement as she served her Church and of course in the political field where most of us who are here interacted with her. She was absolutely fearless. A lady of good breeding who however never minced her words in telling the truth as she saw it, regardless of who she was speaking to. Whenever she stood up to speak wherever it was, whether it was at a Church gathering or at an Inkatha Central Committee meeting or at an Inkatha Conference or at an Inkatha branch meeting everyone kept quiet and listened. We will miss her at our meetings. I know that none of us is indispensable but there are some people in life who are irreplaceable and Clara Xaba is one of those people.

She believed...../3

She believed in the ideals of the black struggle as defined in our Inkatha constitution. She did not hesitate to uplift the Inkatha flag regardless of where she was. She was unashamedly Inkatha through and through. This was often demonstrated to me often when she spoke with pain about some of the denigratory songs that were sung about me, in New York by one of her nephews the famous trumpeter - HUGH MASEKELA. She was a family lady whose family ties with members of the Masekela family were strong. I remember the many occasions when she spoke with warmth and pain about another of her nieces - BARBARA MASEKELA who is a high-ranking official of the African National Congress in exile. What a wonderful child of God she was in our midst!

Let me read to you extracts from a letter she wrote to me on the 4th of June 1989:

My Dearest Brother

Pardon me for using this memo pad. I am spending this day resting at cousin Mdlalose's house because I find it very straining driving back at night. I'll be driving back this afternoon.

I should have written a while ago but I was pressurised by a few things which were really inevitable. One very outstanding was a case of an assistant nurse I dismissed last year April. This case has been hanging over my head for a whole year. Fortunately on the 25th last month the two Industrial Lawyers came to an agreement to settle it without a hearing. Another good settlement was that she cannot work with us anymore. I was concerned about this because reinstating her would have brought down my discipline to nil. I have to recommend her to wherever she applies. This I do not mind doing for her practical work was not bad. She was only silly in other ways. I am also pressurised by

undisciplined...../4

undisciplined pupil nurses who generally behave like barbarians. Oh! our children are really out of control. We keep 42 pupils for training, some are married and 7/8th of them have children at home but their behaviour is appalling. You just cannot imagine what I mean. I sometimes wonder whether its because I belong to the old school and consider morals as very important in girls. The youth of today are mad. I don't even want to say they are confused for that is mild. We have to pray hard for our youth. They are tomorrow's nation. I cannot imagine a nation of characters I deal with every day. It's sad. I think this is brought about by a high rate of illegitimacies of years of unwanted children who have no protection. They form 3/4 of our youth today. Two unstable characters can never produce a stable human being. -----
Two restless nature cannot produce something restful. We have to live with it brother and struggle along. It is indeed very depressing. Sorry to be so long over this issue. It disturbs me a lot because I deal with these girls daily.

The purpose of writing was to let you know that I am going on holiday for 20 days as from the 12th of June. I will be spending my holiday in MALAWI a place called SALIMA. I have a friend there who is nursing at SALIMA Hospital. I have decided to spend all my holidays away from South Africa and see other countries which privilege I did not get while still young. I am looking forward to this holiday to be relieved from the tension I have been living under for all these months.

Brother, I admired the tactful way you influenced JAMILE to see the light last night. You really have to put up with a lot of rot. It's really strange how you survive. We have to pray unceasing for your strength and maintenance. You are a rock brother. I really admire your approach to things. Did you really notice how the committee is standing on shifting sands? Fancy them accepting my suggestion of suspension.

They...../5

They really do not know their minds. Many seem to know what is expected of them in the Central Committee. Its a sad state of affairs. That was sufficient to show how minimal your support is brother. Your way is tough and uphill. These days are very exerting.

Please relax in the Lord. He is by your side always. The day you had to meet COSATU and UDF I had a sleepless night. My intuition showed me they were calling for a slaughter. Please dear brother don't overlook that. Their suggestion of a Peace Pact might contain something we will regret always. I just cannot trust this lot. Please take care!! Sorry to take so much of your time. I have not written for a long time. I'll pray for you even in MALAWI.

All love brother and stay well!!

Your sister always

CLARA

In another letter which is undated she writes among other things:

"Many a time I feel very small at the trust you shower on me. I question myself as to whether I really deserve this. To me you did not look well today. Apart from your puffy eyelids you were rather quiet. You looked tired. I am sure you are really overworking. Rest and relaxation stimulates the nerves. You need it greatly. Please do spend a few hours of complete rest per day. You will not regret it. I am indeed very much concerned. I feel embarrassed when I have to disturb

you in...../6

you in your occupation. I hope it will not happen again. You are always in my thoughts and prayers in your isolation. The lone life you lead hurts deeply indeed. I am glad that at least you have some Ministers who can represent you in other countries. I hope they represent you well. Loyalty is something that cannot be easily assessed in people. It's one of the rarities of this life we live. At any rate my brother remember there is always someone who cares. I am spiritually with you wherever you are. Be comforted. Once more thanks a million.

Your sister and Comrade

CLARA

I just wish those who did not know closely to know the extent of depth of character this lady had. Her Christian faith shines right through her commitment to the struggle for the liberation of her people. We pay homage to a giant not only in physique but in every sense of the word giant. We are left poorer now that she is no more with us.

I will miss the counselling and encouraging letters which she wrote to me quite often. She always insisted that I should not reply to her letters as she knew that I was too busy, but I always did because her letters always had powerful messages for me as a leader in the loneliness of my leadership role. All her messages were characterised always by her commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and her faith was in abundance in whatever she conveyed to me to encourage and comfort me as I assailed as a leader perhaps more than any other political leader in this troubled land, whether Black or White. A giant has departed from our scene and we must praise God, we must praise God and praise God for having been so good to us for so long in lending us the life of this great daughter of Africa.

We can...../7

- 7 -

We can never forget her as long as we live. Our deepest sympathies to her next of kin in both the Masekela and Xaba families. MAY SHE REST IN PEACE.

-----oooOooo-----