OCTOBER 31, 2024

ESTELLE SINKINS

On the morning of October 4, 1988, Portia Phila Ndwandwe (aka Zandile or Zandie), was transported by the Security Branch of the South African Police to a safe house on a farm called Elandskop, near Pietermaritzburg, where she was executed and buried, after she refused to become an agent for the apartheid regime.

Ndwandwe had been appointed as the acting commander of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) Natal Machinery, following the arrest of Thami Zulu, and she was, at that time, the most senior female frontline officer in the organisation's history.

The day before her death, Ndwandwe was driven by Richard Jones to the George Hotel in Manzini, Swaziland, where she met two other "comrades" in a vehicle parked near-

While this was happening, three Security Branch officers, Andrew Taylor, Hendrik Botha and Jakobus Forster, were at the hotel watching from a car parked behind the Isuzu bakkie, which had the two askaris inside that Ndwandwe thought were her "comrades".

The Isuzu was parked behind the Toyota which had other apartheid

Toyota which had other apartheid security police officers, Lawrence Wassermann and Salmon du Preez, inside. At around 6pm, Ndwandwe left the hotel and entered the Isuzu bakkie with the two askaris inside, sitting between them. The bakkie then headed off in the direction of Big Bend, followed by the Toyota, and the other vehicle with Taylor further behind.

About 15km outside Manzini, the police vehicles bottle-necked the Isuzu bakkie and took Ndwandwe to a police house near the Onverwacht border post, where Durban Security Branch commander, Brigadier Johannes Albertus Steyn, was waiting for them.

She was subjected to interrogation by Hendrik Botha, but refused to answer his questions.

Ndwandwe was tortured until she admitted that she was aware of the MK unit commanded by Phumezo Nxiweni, which was responsible for the limpet mine explosion at the Pinetown Post Office on August 12, 1988, as well as other incidents.

When Botha attempted to find out if she was willing to become a police informer, however, she flatly refused. He then handed her over to the Vlakplaas Unit to execute. She was reportedly forced into a grave and shot at the farm in Elandskop.

Her story, titled *The Breastfeeding Warrior* — which was the winner of the Simon Sabela Award for best documentary short film earlier this year — is one of six documentaries in the *Truth Be Told* series to be screened on SABC2 every Sunday from November 3 at 9.30pm.

Created by award-winning film-maker Enver Samuel, the man behind the critically acclaimed *Murder in Paris* which explored the assassination of anti-apartheid activist Dulcie September, each episode was taken from the scores of cases that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommended for prosecution or investigation into more than 20 years ago, but which have yet to be finalised by the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA).

Lives lost

The TRC hearings and the stories that needed to be told



Portia Phila Ndwandwe is the subject of the documentary, *The Breastfeeding Warrior*, which will be screened on SABC2. **PHOTO: FACEBOOK**

Samuel tells the tale of *The Breast-feeding Warrior* through the eyes of her son, Thabang Mabuza, who was five months old when his mother was murdered.

Now a chartered accountant in his 30s, he suffers from transgenerational trauma and is still trying to cope with the loss and anguish caused by his mother's death.

"Using heart-rending archival footage from the exhumation of Nd-wandwe's remains and TRC archive material and intimate interviews, the documentary explores issues of trauma, reconciliation, accountability and forgiveness in South Africa," Samuel says.

"In a sense, Ndwandwe is given a voice through the documentary as her exhumed bones start to "speak" back to us and invoke her spirit.

"The film unpacks questions such as whether Mabuza can reconcile himself with the trauma of his mother's death as he goes in search of answers as to why she was killed; and was his mother's sacrifice worth it or in vain?"

Another KZN case, which features in *Truth Be Told*, is that of Ntombikayise Kubheka, an anti-apartheid activist and member of Umkhonto weSizwe (MK).

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She worked as an operative for the organisation and was responsible for co-ordinating activities between the internal unit and the external unit of the ANC, as well as for co-ordinating other underground activities.

The Security Branch regarded Kubheka as a senior ANC member and had classified her as the leader of



Thabang Mabuza, Phila Portia Ndwande's son, with the Simon Sabela Award for best documentary short, which Enver Samuel won for The Breastfeeding Warrior. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

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the KwaMashu ANC branch. In 1987, she was kidnapped by the Port Natal Security Branch, interrogated and tortured. Her body was then dumped near her home north of Durban.

It was only 10 years later, during the TRC amnesty application, that the family were made aware where Khubeka's bones were buried and they were finally able to give her a funeral and a tombstone.

During the filming of the *Bones of Memory* segment, however, shocking news was revealed which left all those who knew Khubeka and even TRC investigators in disbelief.

At the time of her death, the anti-apartheid activist had a three-year-old daughter. Today, Thuli (40) grapples with the legacy of her mother and how difficult life has been for her without her mother.

Truth Be Told also takes a closer look at the murder of Bheki Mlangeni, a young human rights lawyer who was killed in his Soweto home by a booby-trapped Walkman, sent by apartheid security police officer Eugene de Kock, aka Prime Evil.

It exploded on February 15, 1991, as he began to listen to music. His five-year-old son, Mandla, witnessed the horrific scene. Today, the 35-year-old jazz musician uses music and, by extension, his trumpet, to heal. His debut album, *Bhekisizwe*, was dedicated to a father he never knew.

In the episode, *The Cocoon of Pain*, Samuel delves into the death of Topsy Madaka, a political activist from Port Elizabeth who was killed in April 1982 by one of the apartheid security police's most notorious killers, Gideon Nieuwoudt.

He was kidnapped, drugged and executed with a single shot to the head before his body was burnt. It was only in 1997 during the TRC Amnesty application of the security police responsible for his death that it was finally revealed what had hap-



Award-winning documentary filmmaker Enver Samuel. **PHOTO: X**

pened to him and where his bones were buried, over 300km from Port Flizabeth

In *Death Comes Knocking*, the camera lens turns to the lives and deaths of Richard and Irene Motasi. Richard was a police officer based at the Hammanskraal Police Station. The Northern Transvaal Security Police compiled a file on him which suggested that he was an ANC agent giving sensitive information to the organisation.

On, December 1, 1987, a security police hit squad went to their home. Both Richard and Irene were executed. Their five-year-old son Tshidiso survived by hiding in a cupboard.

The final case in *Truth Be Told* tells the story of Matthews Mabelane, who died like many others in mysterious circumstances while being detained at the notorious John Vorster Square police station in 1977 during the height of apartheid.

His brother Lasch Mabelane and his 96-year-old father died without getting the closure they so desperately wanted.

All the episodes in *Truth Be Told* make use of heart-rending archival footage and intimate interviews with the families of those who were murdered, while exploring issues of trauma, reconciliation, accountability and forgiveness in South Africa.

The documentary series also asks why the NPA failed to rise to the task of investigating and prosecuting those to whom the TRC did not give amnesty or those who did not apply for amnesty.

Asked what had prompted him to make the series, Samuel said: "I decided to make the series about the TRC, following up from my two previous documentaries which looked at unsung heroes and heroines, namely Ahmed Timol and Dulcie September.

"In my research, which involved looking through the TRC archive, my memory was jogged by iconic moments from the TRC that resonated then but were forgotten. I just felt that some of these stories needed to be told."

Samuel's critically acclaimed documentaries, like *Indians Can't Fly* and *Someone To Blame*, have won multiple awards, while *Murder in Paris* has been the recipient of 15 awards, including the Durban International Film Festival Best Documentary Award in 2021.

In the same year, Samuel was awarded the festival's inaugural Human Rights Award for "documenting the lives of South African human rights legends and unearthing the need for a thorough investigation into the deaths of assassinated political leaders".

NEED TO KNOW

Prisoner in my Mind.

November 3 at 9.30pm, SABC2 — Phila Portia Ndwandwe — The Breastfeeding Warrior.

November 10 at 9.30pm, SABC2 — Bheki Mlangeni — Pathways to Light.

November 17 at 9.30pm, SABC2 — Ntombikayise Kubheka — The Bones of Memory.

November 24 at 9.30am, SABC2 — Topsy Madaka — The Cocoon of Pain.

December 1 at 9.30am, SABC2 — Richard and Irene Motasi —

· December 8 at 9.30am, SABC2 — Matthews Mabelane — *Room 1008.*

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Witness ARTS

Get ready for the party

Get out your glow sticks and glitter balls and get ready to party with Lisa Bobbert, Aaron McIlroy and Liam and Jane Magner in *Retro Fest* at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre at the Howard College of the University of KwaZulu-Natal from November 6 to November 17.

Violinist Jane Magner will be incorporating her special brand of contemporary fusion violin into some of the songs, and hubby Liam will be doing music mixes and comedy sketches, while Bobbert and McIlroy will present a host of new characters and an awesome play list.

Audiences are encouraged to dress up, festival style. There will be prizes for the best dressed. Booking is through Webtickets. — Arts Editor.



Chamber Choir magic

The Midlands Chamber Choir will be doing a Christmas choral performance featuring Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus* at the Upper Umgeni Presbyterian Church in Main Street, Howick, at 2.30pm for 4pm on November 30.

There will also be items by Lauridsen and John Rutter on the programme.
Tickets are R80 each. To book, phone

066 247 5606. For those una

For those unable to attend the Howick concert, the Midlands Chamber Choir will be performing at Woodgrove Retirement Village at 5.30pm for 6pm on November 4.

Tickets are R80 each.

To book, phone 066 247 5606.

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— Arts Editor.

