

Tribute to Molly Blackburn

by Sheena Duncan
at the funeral
service

When Gavin phoned me last night to ask me to speak briefly this morning my mind went totally blank.

There are some things which are too deeply felt for any words and such is my sorrow. There are no words to say what we have all felt over the last days and what we are feeling now.

I went back to share with other Black Sash people who have come to Port Elizabeth from all over South Africa my feelings of inadequacy. One of them handed me an old envelope on which she had scribbled some words.

She says she writes things down when she hears them. She doesn't know where this comes from and she doesn't remember when she heard it but she has given me the words I needed.

This is what it says:

A warrior for justice had walked briefly in a troubled land, seeded the minds of men and women with new visions of themselves and changed the course of history.



Molly Blackburn with her husband Gavin and daughters Josephine (16, left) and Fenella (15)

courtesy of Fair Lady

Molly was such a one.

I have not known her for very long and I wish there had been more time for us. But there are some people whom one instantly recognises as great from the moment one meets them.

Molly was such a one — a truly great person.

Yesterday I opened the Black Sash magazine of May 1985 which reports on our national conference held here in Port Elizabeth last March.

There is a photograph of Brian Bishop taken in Namibia.

There is a photograph of Matthew Goniwe and one of Molly. All of them — 'Warriors for justice who walked briefly in a troubled land.'

They are all dead.

We weep today but we know that they have changed the course of history and their work will continue.

This is the tribute we pay to them — our commitment to go on trying

to follow them as 'warriors for justice' — our dedication to the cause they served.

We will not forget them and we will not be turned back from the path they trod.

Molly's death is a national as well as a bitterly felt personal tragedy.

All of us today reach out to comfort her husband, her children, her family, her friends, especially Di, and all the thousands of people who mourn her now.

There is a verse from the first psalm which is for our consolation:

And she shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth her fruit in season; her leaf shall also not wither; and whatsoever she doeth shall prosper.

In the shade of her tree we shall bring forth our fruit in due season and we will always seek to prosper the work she has begun.

A sister remembers . . .

It is two weeks today since the accident in which Molly and Brian were killed. After the funeral — that amazing and wonderful day when black and white wept, sang, danced and shared their sorrow — I found myself pondering often what it was that had turned Molly from an industrious, social housewife like so many others, into the phenomenon that swept 70 000 Uitenhage mourners to their feet, clenched fist raised, shouting 'Viva Molly'. When was the moment for her when she suddenly started to stride towards black South Africans with hands outstretched?

I can see that Molly possessed a fairly unique set of attributes. Having won the PFP Provincial Council seat for

Walmer in 1981 she had a platform which she could — and certainly did — use to put pressure on government bodies. She had an upbringing in which the pursuit of justice and liberal values were considered important. She had an attractive personality, a good speaking voice, lots of confidence and an acute and well-organised mind. She had always been determined and single-minded in her pursuit of a set goal. She had a husband who was very supportive as was her Member of Parliament. Other women (and men) have possessed most or even all of these qualities, so how did she differ?

She differed in that she gave herself to the black communities of the Eastern Cape. This has also been done