

Dear Star

I had intended to pass by your place the other day, seeing that I was home at last after a full 14 years in exile. I found our Meadowlands township a bit tattered in the inside but with fancy frills where there was empty space or soccer fields.

BREATHING SPACE

Yes, Meadowlands, like other townships, is choking with overpopulation. People haven't got anywhere to live, hence the absence of any breathing space. Rumour has it that the Land Act will be repealed soon. Good riddance I say. I only hope that people, more especially the poor, will not be asked to buy that land with the money that is not there. In any case, that land belongs to them.

As I was saying, strolling down Odendaal Street, my eye caught your place. So I said to myself: "Why don't you pop in while you still have some time and say 'hi' to Star's mum. Who knows, she might part with a smile and I might learn a

thing or two from her about the township. Remember I used to pass by your match box house on Sunday afternoons and we would exchange a word or two and it used to do me good in my mind. Yes, those days I was teaching at Orlando North Junior Secondary School and even teaching one of your younger sisters, remember?

Your mother is fine though a bit on the older side. I greet her. She squints her eyes while her forehead does some frowns of some sorts but she cannot make head or tail of who the devil I am. I blurt out my name and she can't help but smother me with lippy kisses. Whereupon she invites me into the house through to her dining room which is usually reserved for serious matters apart from being turned into a bedroom at night.

Before I can go any further, she asks about you and I tell her what I know - that the last time I put my eyes on you was when you

had paid us a visit in Sofia in Bulgaria 1981. I also reveal that through a common friend of ours, I got hold of your address recently and I was pleased to hear that you were fine and pursuing a degree in medicine.

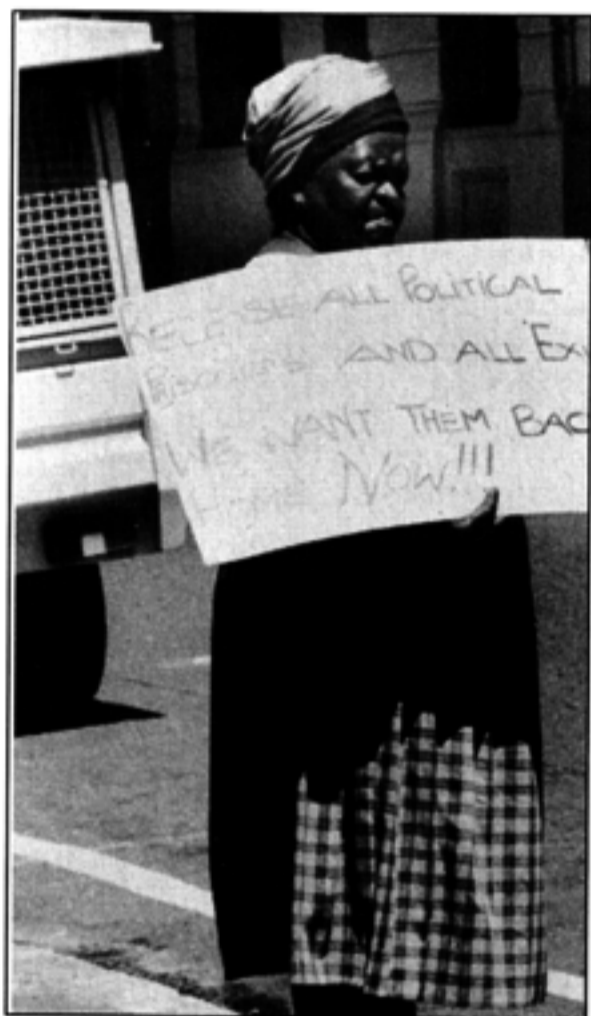
Star my friend, I was surprised how this piece of information did wonders to her heavy heart. Do you know that she wore black for you thinking that you were no more a breathing soul? Do you know that she actually went to Botswana to see what remained of your charred body? Do you know that while you were studying, it was purported by the police that you were a commander of a unit of Umkhonto we Sizwe in Botswana and that you were killed during one of the numerous bombing raids of the South African Defence Force in that country?

ALIVE AND WELL

So Star my brother, your mother had all along been gnawed by the thought of the brutal way in which you died. And when I explained that not only



But you see, this was a very special day for her in another way too. She tells me that what also puts a spark in her heart is that on this particular day she is expecting your younger brother Moss to arrive from Robben Island, that notorious prison which for years had swallowed some of the finest sons of our country. I heard that he was one of the accused in the infamous Pietermaritzburg trial of 1978. It is said he was sentenced to an ef-



fective 18 years. He was accused Number Two. You can imagine how young he was then.

GREAT NEWS

Well the great news that your mother dished was that he was arriving that same day in the afternoon. Of course I could have waited to have a glimpse of him and take part in the toyi-toying that would follow, but I had to rush somewhere. But I promised that I would pass by and say 'hi' to him later. Which I did. Your mother would be pleased if you could send her just one photo. Anxiety has taken the better of her.

"Kwena"
(Saul Pelle)

Language policy conference

Distilling the experience of academics and community, labour and professional organisations the Cape Town Conference on National Language Policy acknowledged that it is not only the task of political parties to formulate and implement language policy.

It must be the product of a broad process of consultation.

The following are some of the conclusions the conference arrived at:

- No languages should be labelled as "minorities". All South African languages should enjoy equal status. Affirmative action should be taken to promote languages that have been marginalised.
- Within organisations meetings must be conducted in the language that the majority of participants understand. Provision will have to be made for others.
- African languages must be taught at least in those schools which have opened their doors to all races.
- Specialists in university African language departments must be able to speak these languages.
- Linguistic departments must include African languages.
- All people have the right to function in the language of their choice and therefore the right to translation and interpretation. Language rights of citizens must be on statute books.

A National Language Policy Conference, held 12 - 14 September in Cape Town, debated language policy for a democratic South Africa. Khetiwe Marais, of Afrophone Translations Service, reports.

- A Translators Charter must be drawn up.
- Companies must be given incentives to promote multilingualism in their operations.
- English could be one of the official languages – provided this does not preclude other languages.
- Multilingualism should be encouraged, not legislated; and, to this end, assistance should be offered.
- It is inappropriate to set a standard for spoken language – all spoken varieties should be acceptable within the limits of mutual intelligibility. ♦