

Obituary: Hazel Goldreich (Berman)



On another Wednesday morning, 2 September 2026, in the United Kingdom, Hazel Goldreich passed away after a long life lived, marked by extreme courage and humility. Born on 5th November 1929, Hazel moved to London in 1963, though not by choice.

South Africa's Liberation Struggle is broadly characterised by the sacrifices of successive generations of people who committed themselves to the removal of the apartheid state. In this mass struggle, which eventually took on global proportions, we know of and learn about key figures, the famous personalities, the larger-than-life men and women from across the political milieu. The big guns, so to say.

What we don't hear about are the experiences of people, particularly women, the wives, mothers, daughters, and grandmothers who faced extreme peril and are mainly forgotten, airbrushed to the periphery of history. Hazel Goldreich is one such unsung heroine of the Liberation Struggle.

Together with her husband Arthur Goldreich, a founding member of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), and her sons Nicholas and Paul, they took up residence at Liliesleaf, Rivonia, in late 1961. This was to be no ordinary life journey, for earlier that year, the South African Communist Party had purchased Liliesleaf Farm to function as a secret meeting place. They asked Arthur to front, with his family, as the tenant of the farm, which Hazel agreed to do at great risk.

Nelson Mandela was hiding there when the family arrived. In *Long Walk to Freedom*, he described how his children would visit, and they would play with Nicholas and Paul, "in this

idyllic bubble". On one such day, he bragged to Hazel about his marksmanship, who jokingly replied that he would never hit his target perched in a high tree. Mandela shot the bird, only to be chastised by "this small boy", Paul, which for Mandela was an epiphanic moment. In 1962, when Mandela was about to leave for Natal, Hazel remonstrated with him not to go, for she experienced a sense of great dread of what lay ahead. Hazel watched the car leave, filled with foreboding, and within a week, the police's Security Branch captured Mandela.

On 11 July 1963, the world came crashing down when the Security Branch raided Liliesleaf Farm, capturing key MK members who were engaged in a meeting. Hazel collected her sons from school as the raid struck and drove home into chaos and pandemonium. Of those there that day, which included a handcuffed attorney, Hazel was the only person who demanded to see a search warrant, which was produced. Later, with her husband, she was led into her bedroom and stood before the head of Security Branch, seated on their bed; a monster once described as South Africa's very own Heinrich Himmler.

Pointing to their children beyond the window, he taunted Hazel that her sons would be orphans and that she and Arthur would be hanged. The couple were then separated, and while Hazel prepared dinner, other policemen standing in the kitchen said, "Look at her, she is so calm, she must be the ringleader". Later, when she went to take a meal to Arthur, the police tried to stop her. Undeterred, she shouted at them, "It is his right to eat a meal". They relented.

Arrested and separated from her sons, Hazel spent at least 90 days in detention. Lord Joel Joffe, who later defended the accused at the Rivonia Trial, arranged an exit permit and a one-way ticket. Hazel flew to Israel with her boys, where she later divorced Goldreich and, in 1966, left for the United Kingdom. A refugee from South Africa, Hazel raised her two sons, Nicholas and Paul, alone.

Hazel rarely spoke of her experiences from that time and avoided any public mention of her role. Yet, it was an important one, at a key milestone in South Africa's history. Hazel Goldreich is of a generation of people who stood up for their values and principles in the face of tyranny and who risked their lives by doing so. Her memory survives through her sons Nicholas and Paul, their wives Vivienne and Natasha, and grandchildren Matthew and Sophie, Anna, Sam, Rosy and Jack, and all who knew her.

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