

Two Sisters



Patrick was born in a rural family in South Africa near Springs on the 6th of April 1950. His father was a migrant labourer from Mozambique, working as a miner in South Africa at Springs. It was a tough existence. Migrant miners were badly paid and lived in bleak, inhospitable, single sex hostels on the mines. The miners were allowed to go home only once or twice a year, for Easter and Christmas. Patrick's father formed a relationship with a woman called Betty Thibedi in a nearby township. He had to share his meagre wage between his two women and their children. The other one was from Mozambique. From an early age Patrick already knew that he had to fend for himself. Eventually he ended up working as a house painter & street photographer. Because of his talent for soccer, he played games for the local leagues.

His first brush with the law came in 1964 when he was 14 years old - he went to the nearest cafe to buy bread and entered through the "Whites Only" entrance. He was beaten and

sentenced for two months in prison. He was sold to Mr Man's farm in Ogies to work there for a period of two months because he did not have R10 to pay the fine.

In 1976 Patrick was travelling in Zeerust, North West of Johannesburg, taking his girlfriend to visit her parents when they were stopped and searched by the police. They found his camera and were suspicious because there were acts of ANC sabotage in the area. They thought him a spy for the organisation. He was detained for six months and his car and camera which were taken by the police were never returned to him. After his detention he went to Secunda, a town several hours east of Johannesburg. He got a job at SASOL, the largest coal oil plant in the world. Very quickly he advanced and ended up as a driver which was a well paid position. His main job was to fetch coal from a neighbouring mine and bring it to SASOL. His soccer playing prowess made him popular on the plant and in the community. Eventually he got married and had 2 children.

Unfortunately Patrick was in the wrong place at the wrong time. His third encounter with the law was 1st June 1980. Mkhonto We Sizwe (MK), the ANC military wing, bombed the Secunda plant along with two other SASOL installations. Patrick was arrested in the aftermath of the bombs - he was one of the last drivers to leave the area where the bombs were placed and the police were looking for ANC co-operatives inside SASOL who helped MK operatives to enter the plant. At the time the police had the power to hold people who were suspected of political crimes indefinitely, without the right to a lawyer or to see family. Torture was routine. Patrick was detained for two months and he left the prison a changed man. By now he had two run-ins with the police despite the fact that he had avoided any kind of political involvement all his life. He had been through hell for being innocent. He decided that if he was going to suffer the trauma of detention, he might as well suffer it for a reason and do something.

Patrick crossed illegally into Mozambique and was handed over to Freelema and was detained at Mashava prison for 10 months. After intensive interrogation by Freelema & the ANC they found that Patrick was not a spy. His mother contacted the underground unit and told Slovo that Patrick was detained at Mashava. Joe Slovo sent Willie Williams who was in the Intelligence Service of the ANC. He was released to the headquarters of the ANC and Joe Slovo came to see Patrick.

Patrick made Joe an offer he couldn't refuse – he could bring the Secunda plant to a standstill and make it burn for days, because of his knowledge of the plant. Patrick went to Angola to train in explosives, and came back to Maputo to prepare for his operation. He chose to work alone, which was unusual for MK operatives.

On the day of the operation he hid himself on a conveyer belt that carried coal from a neighbouring mine to the inside of SASOL. His plan was to place one mine on a water treatment plant on the SASOL premises, followed by another on a reactor inside one of the main plants. The first explosion would act as a warning to the thousands of workers inside the reactor – ANC policy was that no lives were to be lost in the operations. It would also make it hard for the authorities to fight the fire. He planned for the reactor land mine to explode fifteen minutes after the water treatment plant. Patrick left SASOL as the first mine went off. The

main plant emptied as planned. Police on the scene guessed that there was another land mine and found it before it could explode. If it had, the fire would have been virtually unstoppable. Patrick had three more land mines and he was determined to use them. Over the next three days he bombed two electrical sub-stations near Witbank, plunging the entire town into total darkness.

After evading the police for three days Patrick was arrested. He was convicted of terrorism, high- treason and possession of false passports and sentenced to jail for 24 years. After having served 10 years he was amnestied in 1991 along with all political prisoners.

Currently he lives in North East South Africa with his three children and 233 fostered children, orphaned by AIDS.