

The feeling that I associate most with Sheena is that of reassurance in the midst of the insanity and suffering that was apartheid. I remember as a teenager sitting in the Black Sash offices and being horror-struck by the impact of the pass laws on ordinary people's lives, at the same time as awe-struck by Sheena's empathy, respect and perseverance in sitting with person after person, day after day, listening to their stories, discussing options with them, taking statements, writing letters, phoning lawyers, and in some cases having to explain that nothing could be done.

Years later, when I was part of TRAC and we were working with people resisting forced removals, I remember the feeling of comfort that Sheena's presence radiated. It was not that she could, or pretended to be able to solve the problems facing people. It was something to do with the direct and open way in which she stepped forward to engage with and support people confronted with the brutality of the apartheid state. Her combination of abiding respect for people, whoever they were, her shining intelligence and the fact that she understood not only how the laws worked, but also that they were insane ó put people at ease and somehow shifted the scale of situations from being objectively hopeless to becoming entirely human. She had a way of shifting the focus away from the unreality of the pass laws, forced removals and detention without trial, to the power, hope and sanity created when people from different walks of life come together to support one another in confronting, opposing and staring-down injustice.

Sheena had very high expectations not only of herself, but also of other people. She brought out the best in people, but also accepted people for who they were, and valued the very different kinds of contributions that different people made. The Sash was rich in extraordinary and sassy women, and sometimes a bit chaotic. It was wonderful to hear Sheena's deep laugh erupting from the backseat position she preferred to take in meetings, and always reassuring to see her approaching, swaying slightly from side to side. I felt she was our anchor and our backstop. Her powerful intelligence, compassion and indefatigable hard work were buttressed by a deep faith that enabled her to radiate reassurance in a chaotic world where the rest of us could otherwise have faltered.

Hamba kahle Sheena Duncan