

# Lettie Malindi (d. 2010)

Mrs Malindi, who worked in the Black Sash Advice Office in Cape Town for 28 years, passed away on Sunday, the 27th of June 2010 after suffering a stroke. She was 89. Lettie worked in the Advice Office from the very beginning in 1958, and took credit for teaching Eulalie Stott and Noel Robb (and probably many others) all about the pass laws.



Lettie was also a very active member of the ANC branch in Gugulethu - her parents joined the ANC in the Eastern Cape when it was founded in 1912. During apartheid, Lettie was charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act for leading a protest against the pass laws, but was later acquitted. She spent five months in detention in Bindon Prison Farm. **[Read the tribute article in the Cape Times and Watch an interview we recorded with Lettie Malinda a few years ago](#)**

## **A tribute from Black Sash Trustee Di Oliver**

The Black Sash owes her a great debt of gratitude for her outstanding contribution and great loyalty to the organisation, particularly as a stalwart of the Advice Office. Mrs Malindi worked voluntarily for a full year when she first came to work in what was then known as the Athlone Advice Office, subsequent to which she became the first employee of the Black Sash. Her early years of interpreting contributed to her depth of knowledge about the effect of the pass laws and although she continued to work officially as interpreter in Cape Town's Advice Office (that had moved from Athlone to Mowbray) until her retirement, she was a first rate case worker. She taught many of us who volunteered as Advice Office workers - not only what we needed to know about the pass laws, but how to be streetwise - and wise about a great deal else too!

### **An excerpt from Noel Robb's book**

In talking about the year 1960, Noel Robb records the following about Mrs Malindi in her book "The Sash and I": *"Then, in April, hundreds of people, believed to be 'left wing', if not communist, were arrested and held in detention for five months without trial. Among them were Jean Bernardt, a Black Sash member, Nancy Dick, who was Jack Simons' secretary, Jack Simons himself, and Lettie Malindi, our only interpreter at the Advice Office. Lettie was held for five months, during which time her eldest son died, and she was not allowed to attend the funeral. Throughout her detention she was interrogated about our Advice Office, but as she maintained she knew no English, and was our cleaning woman, she managed to avoid what she believed would have been 'letting us down'."*

### **A tribute from Sally Cristini**

Mrs. Malindi, Lettie or Mrs. M., as she was fondly known in the Advice Office was a BIG person. She had guts. She was 'in your face'. She was awalking history textbook concerning the pass laws, detention without trial, forced removals, being a black mother and wife of an imprisoned activist, hiding from the authorities... the list is endless.

She could have been a bitter victim of all this but she chose to harness her energy into rectifying the human wrongs that seemed to pervade the daily lives of most of South Africans. Her interpreting for the Black Sash Advice Offices, started at the Athlone Advice Office and then at Mowbray before her retirement.

In the Advice Offices she was a raconteur of note and would not countenance the bullying tactics of the powers-that-were. Her no-nonsense discourse flummoxed many of them. I am going to miss not going to Gugs to visit her - to hear her incisive remarks about the state of our beloved country and amusing anecdotes of which she had many. She made me laugh buckets. I was so glad that some of us from Sash were able to celebrate her 87th birthday party at her home in March 2008, while Zoli was still alive.

More recently she expressed sadness that the younger generation of ANC cadres were 'betraying the older generation of ANC activists who had sacrificed their lives for the freedom of the young whose behaviour she found disappointing'. She had an incisive wit and she articulated so expressively and intuitively until the end. So hard to accept that she's gone. Her inspiration will live on and on and on. Bravo wonderful woman, mother, and precious friend and mentor. Heartfelt love to her children Zoe and Leonard and all her grandchildren.

### **A tribute from Susan Groves**

I am sad to hear of Mrs Malindi's death but also grateful that many of us could greet her again in May at the SASH gathering in Cape Town to remember Sheena. It was clear she was in poor health but it was such a pleasure to see her and be with her. I like to think the evening was memorable for her. Hambe kakuhle comrade.

### **A tribute from Candy Malherbe**

When I think of the scores of neophytes whom Mrs Malindi inducted into the Black Sash Advice Office, I know she must have been stoical, controlled and patient to the nth degree. But that is not how she came across. She always seemed sure in her knowledge and strong enough to carry on no matter how long the journey to the future to which she had committed herself. The fact that she took our measure and stayed with us is one of the greatest compliments which we have received. I was always glad to see her in life, and now treasure her memory.

### **A tribute from Sue Townsend**

She certainly was a character, not always clear and direct...she wanted you to work some things out for yourself. She was a pleasure to work with as she 'interpreted' on a multiplicity of levels. At the same time, she was a stroppy woman and did not suffer fools easily (and that included other advice office workers). She also, in the AO, downplayed her own role in the struggle. Before she retired we realised that no provision had been made for her to have a pension (apart from the state one) so we did a very daring thing and used Sash money to buy one for her from Old Mutual...those were the days when there was not a spare cent to use for such things...but she was that important to us. In all things in those days of the eighties she was a mother to me.

### **A tribute from Cherry Fisher**

From the first day that I came to the Black Sash Advice Office as a volunteer I realised that to work alongside Lettie Malindi would be both a privilege and an extension to my education.

All of us who came to know her by our association to the common cause would gain by that experience, did enjoy her wry sense of humour and benefited from her realistic philosophy about life and people.

At times of stress and despondency she was the foundation upon which we all depended. At any expression of mine that even hinted at despair that we could not achieve even our more modest goals she would put me back into the right way of thinking with here inevitable: "Man Cherry, half a loaf is better than no loaf at all !"

Her knowledge and experience and understanding were deep and responsive. I learnt much from her not only about the pass laws but about the way life was for others. She was a great teacher - I remain in benefit of that.