**Nontsikelelo ‘Ntsiki’ Biko (nee Mashalaba)**

**Recipient of the Ubuntu Honour from the National Heritage Council of South Africa**

Nontsikelelo ‘Ntiski’ Mashalaba was born on 09th May 1946 in Libode District close to Mthatha in the Eastern Cape. She is the fifth child of the late Nancy and Abson Mashalaba; Abson being the Principal at the Rainy Mission Primary School where she enrolled for her junior schooling.

She continued her studies at Dininkosi Primary School in Corana, Mthatha, and atBuntingville Secondary School where she completed her junior certificate. She then enrolled at Shawbury Senior Secondary School where she completed her matric, and went to do her nursing training at King Edward Hospital in Durban.

In 1966 while there, she met Bantu Stephen Biko who was a medical student at the University of Natal. When she was asked about her relationship with Steve Biko she replied: *“I must say, he was very politically involved then as president of SASO… and somehow I fell for him”.*

Three years later in 1970 the young couple were married and they had two children, Nkosinathi (“The Lord Is With Us”), born in 1971, and Samora (named in honour of Mozambique nationalist leader, Samora Machel), born in 1975. Mrs. Biko was further blessed with a daughter, Bulelwa, born in 1988.

Ntsiki Biko’s nursing training at King Edward was summarily terminated without reason beyond her association with Steve Biko; the hospital authorities questioned if she knew Steve and, upon affirming her relationship with him, she was dismissed with immediate effect. It was a known fact that she not only supported her husband’s political ideals and philosophy of Black Consciousness, but she also lived them. Following her dismissal she struggled to find another job by virtue of her association with and marriage to Steve.

**She therefore stayed at home and tasked herself with raising their children and working for the community. The Biko family home was always a centre of convergence for core activists of the Black Consciousness Movement from all over the country**, including Malusi Mpumlwana, Mapetla and Noni Mohapi, Thenjiwe Mtintso, Thoko Mabanjwa, Peter Jones, Sibongile Mkhabela and others. It was always Mama Biko who welcomed and accommodated them.

In March 1973, the apartheid state cracked down on the Black Consciousness Movement, banning leaders like Drake Kgalushi Koka and Bokwe Mafuna, who were engaged in union projects. Steve Biko and Barney Pityana were banned in the sa me month, and in January 1974, another colleague and friend of the Biko family, Onkgpotse Abram Tiro, was killed by a parcel bomb while in exile in Botswana.

The consistent confrontation with the state caused much strain on the Biko family, but they were relentless in the cause of freedom. Mama Biko obtained work as a nurse at St. Matthews Hospital in Keiskamahoek until she moved in 1977 to All Saints Hospital, eNgcobo.

The historical events of 16th June 1976 marked a critical phase, not only in the history of this country, but also in the family life of the Biko’s as Steve was arrested on 27thAugust 1976, during the tail end of the Soweto Students Uprising, and held in solitary confinement for 101 days.

Mama Biko was still working as a nurse at All Saints Hospital when Steve was arrested on 18th August 1977; she would never see her husband and the father of her children again. As history records, Biko was brutally murdered while in police detention. His death was characterized by the usual collaboration of the state, the police and the medical establishment in covering up the cause.

Mama Biko endured much hardship as she lost her job at All Saints Hospital because she attended the inquest into the death of her husband and other detainees. She remained unemployed until 1981 when she found employment at Grey Hospital in King William’s Town.

Even here, however, the racist white authorities intimidated other staff members not to associate with her and she became isolated amongst her peers. Working with stern resilience, Mama Biko continued to be a champion of community-based activism - a distinct trait of the approach of the Black Consciousness philosophy - upholding the Biko family name and preserving Steve’s legacy.

**During this time, Mrs Biko focused on community work, with her passions directed towards education and healthcare.** She became member of the Ginsberg Civic and a Trustee of the Ginsberg Education Trust which assisted impoverished youths to access education through schools and universities with bursaries. The Ginsberg Education Trust later evolved into the Zingisa Trust Fund.

In 1997, following the TRC Hearings, Mama Biko travelled abroad with her eldest son on an investigative tour to see how other iconic figures had been memorialized around the world, and to establish the most appropriate memorialization for Steve Biko, in line with best international practice.

During this tour she met the widow of the one of the leaders of the civil rights movement in the United States of America, Mrs. Correta Scott King, wife to Dr. Martin Luther King, as well as the children of Malcom X who had just buried their mother, Betty Shabazz.

**In 1998 Mama Biko spearheaded the establishment of the Steve Biko Foundation**, together with her son, Nkosinathi. She serves as an active member of the Board of Trustees of the Foundation. In 1999, she was involved in motor vehicle accident which left her reliant on a walking stick.

**As a dynamic and well-grounded community practitioner, some of her other roles as a community activist include: Secretary of the Star of Hope, a rugby club in Ginsberg, King William’s Town; Secretary of the Ginsberg Civic Association; and an official of the Ginsberg Community Choir.**

**In the years between 2005 and 2012 Mama Biko enjoyed great involvement in the establishment of the Steve Biko Centre, opened on the 30th November 2012.The Steve Biko Centre is now Mama Biko’s primary base for her continuous community activism.**

She participates consistently in a number of programmes at the Centre including public dialogues, book launches, art exhibitions and performances. Her working life was spent in the public health field, serving the people and communities with a tenacious spirit and sincere dedication. **It is largely through her steadfast service to the community that she has consistently expressed her activism.**

**Mama Biko’s life is a testimony to her enduring commitment to community-based activism, grounded in the ethos of the Black Consciousness philosophy. Her legacy and impact is felt, not only by those who interact with her on a daily basis in the township of Ginsberg where she continues to be an inspiration, both to the young and old, but also the wider Eastern Cape and South African communities.**