

VELISWA BADUZA

Veliswa Mckata was born into a loving Christian family living in Duncan Village in East London - but then came apartheid and they had to move, a traumatic upheaval, to live in the new township, Mdantsane – and her parents are still there! She is rightly proud of her parents. Her father worked for the council, her mother was a Nursing Sister at Frere Hospital, and they brought up five children, all of whom have made their way in life. The family were Methodists, and the children were brought up in a busy church life that included teaching in the Sunday School, singing in the choir, Band of Hope meetings and attending youth groups.

When her mother had to go to Port Elizabeth for Midwifery training, Veliswa was very small, in Primary School, and was sent to live with her grandmother in Idutywa for a few years. This was an almost magical time for her, living in a homestead on those green rolling hills. It was a simple life – the maize had to be pounded, the water carried, the wood cut, the floors polished with dung in wonderful patterns, pit toilets . . . there were fields to “badza” and cows to milk (she loved the smell of that warm milk), chickens and a pig pen. There were no books but granny told stories, all kinds of stories, magical Xhosa stories. She went to Healdtown for her senior years at school - a Methodist mission near Fort Beaufort, an institution which was rightly proud of many famous alumni, but which, by the 1970s had become a shadow of the glorious mission school of the past, ruined by apartheid education. After matric she studied at Fort Hare for 3 years, gaining a B A in Human Resources and living in Residence. She remembers that special period of her life, young and full of enthusiasm, having a great social life with friends, and reacting acutely to the appalling apartheid legislation of that time. Those were truly bad years for anyone of colour, a time when countless numbers of people were being picked up in the townships or anywhere and brutally arrested. Steve Biko was one of them, imprisoned, tortured and killed in prison. Veliswa and her friends would flout the silly (and terrible) laws of apartheid, inviting the police to arrest them – but they didn’t! Many people fled the country, Donald Woods among them and Veliswa herself drove “wanted” people through the border post into Lesotho to escape imprisonment or worse in South Africa and find safety – and it was scary because she had to drive into Lesotho with a full car and come out again just herself alone! Thankfully she was not found out.

Johnson & Johnson (J&J) had given her scholarships for university so she worked for them as a Personnel Officer when she qualified (B A Human Resources). The company had pledged its support for the “Sullivan code” and was a beacon of hope with its Leadership Development - a programme which must begin in the early years of childhood. From the very beginning it was the language barrier which proved to be a major stumbling block and had to be overcome. She worked for J&J for 5 years and then enrolled for a 2 year Master’s degree in Philosophy at UCT but did not complete this. From 1990-96, still through J&J, she worked on a programme in E London which enrolled children from the townships into the youngest classes at Clarendon Primary School, a White school. This presented new problems – the little ones had to get up so early to catch the school bus that they arrived “tired”, there was no one at home to help them with their homework, and there were so many differences in clothes, language, background!

It was at J&J that she met a young man who was working there too, Mthuthuzeli Baduza from Aliwal North, who was an Anglican, and who, in 1994, worked for the SABC in the Eastern Cape. They were married in 1996, they lived in Vincent, they shared their Christian faith and she joined Mthuthuzeli in the Anglican Church.

Veliswa then worked for some years with the new democratic South African government in Bisho, translating Hansard and conducting simultaneous interpreting during Parliamentary debates – and this was a good introduction to the complicated and demanding ways of government and law.

“Transformation” has many meanings – spiritual, social, fashionable, intellectual, artistic - it depends upon the context. Veliswa is enthusiastic about transformation and uses the word in the political sense, which is not surprising. The “NEW” South Africa has been born, White officials go out, Black ones come in. This movement was in full swing and in 2002 Veliswa was recommended to serve on the Board of Sheriffs in the Cape Peninsula, was appointed and was obviously well qualified for the job! That was when she left the Bisho and came to Cape Town. This was achieved with the help of Swedish funding so that the composition of the sheriffs’ profession in the country would be transformed. Then Veliswa was actually appointed as a Sheriff herself, and her district was the South Peninsula. Based in Simonstown, her area includes Masiphumelele, Ocean View, Kommetjie, Kalk Bay, Noordhoek, Lakeside, Muizenberg, even Capricorn. It is a huge area of work requiring compassion, firm decision, good legal training and expertise but it can be rewarding. The individual stories of the people in trouble, who are the ones she meets as a sheriff, are heart-breaking but she has to implement the law even if it means eviction so it is a job which can bring deep heartache.

Mthuthuzeli had worked for the SABC in East London, and he was able to move to the SABC in Cape Town. They lived in Pinelands and joined the parish of St Mary Magdalene in Gugulethu where both served as Lay Preachers and were later licensed as Lay Ministers. This ministry was sacred to her and led her to the priestly vocation. She hopes to reach this goal with a full licence, until which time she is attached to St Paul’s parish. They moved to Constantia so that she can travel easily to her work in Simonstown and environs as well as to St Paul’s where Veliswa was ordained as a Transitional Deacon in April 2021, and is now studying at Stellenbosch for two years in order to gain a post-graduate Diploma in Theology. She has a demanding schedule but, guess what, Mthuthuzeli helps her with the sheriff work because he has retired from the SABC – a wonderful steady support. Their children are independent now –one studied Drama and Film in Los Angeles and is an actress, and one is a Chef-Accountant, having a B.Comm. from UCT and a degree for Culinary Art in California.

It has been a long road. Veliswa regrets one thing – St Andrew’s in Newlands has a Quiet Day once a month but such days are too few. She – and perhaps all of us – need Quiet Days for retreat and meditation.

It is good to have you with us at St Paul’s, Veliswa.