

Dr. Reuel J. Khoza

TRIBUTE TO DONALD DAWORT BONGANI DON MKHWANAZI

BY DR REUEL JETHRO KHOZA FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE OF DECADES STANDING

OMkhwanazi na bakwa-Mkhwanazi
OMajombozi na bakwa-Majombozi no Ntuli

In particular Sizwe and your siblings who provide us with much scope for sublimation. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to pay tribute to Don Bongani Mkhwanazi, my brother not by any biological dictates, but my brother by choice – conscious deliberate choice. Themba Mkhwanazi – you now have to step into Don’s boots and be my choice brother. Cicero advises that “Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.” ONdonga and all present at this memorial service, I thank you for this opportunity to pay tribute to Don.

My gratitude extends to the BMF, in particular to the current President, Mncane Mthunzi and the dedicated BMF staff, who acted with such efficacy and promptitude in organizing this Memorial Service.

ONdonga and your kith and kin, Sithi Akuhlanga Lungehlanga. The sudden, heart-rending and devastating departure of Don, hit, not only the Mkhwanazi Family and the Ndonga clan; it hit the greater family to which Don fondly belonged.

Let us all derive solace in Clive Campbell’s observation that “To live in the hearts we leave behind is not to die.” Don’s positive influence and unmistakable impact live on, in our hearts and minds.

When Don was born to baba uDaniel (Dan) and Mama uJoyce (Bathokozile), he was not just a gift to the Mkhwanazis of Chesterville or Durban. He was a gift to a greater segment of humanity – South Africa, parts of Africa and arguably further afield. The huge void left by Don is felt by all of us.

In this regard, Charles de Gaulle’s observation that “One must wait until the evening to see how splendid the day was; one cannot judge life until death,” is apposite. Now that the sunshine that was Don is dimmed, what can we say about this life so abundantly lived?

I first met Don at Unilever in Durban during the first half of 1976 as a fellow Marketing Management Trainee. He and I just clicked and resonated instantly. Within months, Unilever witnessed the burgeoning in the number of Black Management trainees, (including Hixonia Nyasulu, Denis Zimu, Philip Mangaliso). Unilever decided to invite us to change canteens to join the then white management establishment. Our principled stance and response was: If indeed you are the pioneering enlightened organization you purport to be, opposed to apartheid as you claim, just demolish the wall separating the races. We refused to be the exempted few. The message reached home and before long the canteens were desegregated.

In 1978, Don and I were part of a successful group of Shell scholarship candidates sent to Britain. In addition to successfully completing our studies, Don made sure that by the time some of us returned home, we had been duly introduced to the ANC in exile, including the inevitable visit to the Tambo House.

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Upon returning home at the end of 1979, Shell duly employed us in managerial positions in Johannesburg, but could secure us no abode, no accommodation because we did not have Section 10.1a. The stage was set for a bruising confrontation with Apartheid with Don at the forefront. Twenty months later we had houses in part of what was then called Selection Park in Pimville.

In 1979, Don, Sam Minyuku and I, together with a few of those so-called Shell Scholars were part of the BMF hard launch.

In 1986, Don assumed the presidency of the BMF, which till then was essentially a forum for Blacks grappling with the challenge of upward mobility in corporate South Africa. Don brought into sharper focus our appreciation of the reality that the BMF was a player in a political economy not just in business corporations. Among his major contributions was thrusting to the fore the issue of black economic empowerment. During his tenure, the BMF began in earnest to reach out to other key players beyond the business arena, including the then banned ANC and PAC as well as the trade union movement. Mkhwanazi did much to raise the political profile of the BMF.

In 1987 Ndonga led us in a nine-person BMF delegation excursion to Lusaka where we met with and engaged such ANC stalwarts as Thabo Mbeki, Pallo Jordan, Jacob Zuma, Johnny Makhathini, Joel Netshitenzhe and Oliver Tambo. To test our mettle, Pallo accused the BMF of attempting the impossible: trying to ride two horses simultaneously; corporate business and the struggle for liberation: To which we retorted that you can in fact ride more than one horse at once, if you are ingenious and creative; inspan, harness and make them draw your cart.

This led to a more serious discourse in which we argued that in as much as Apartheid was politics of oppression and a psychology of dehumanization and subjugation; it was more vicious as economics of exclusion, exploitation and institutionalised Black impoverishment. We argued that to slay the Apartheid monster, we needed to understand it from a variety of vantage points and attack it as such. It was at this engagement that I heard Don argue the need for corporate guerrillas. The late O.R. Tambo sprung from his seat as if propelled by a spring to embrace us with enthusiasm.

Don Mkhwanazi, Lot Ndlovu and I, shared our admiration of Frederick Douglass, Afro-American former slave and deep thinker who advised as followers on self-determination: **“Our destiny is largely in our hands. If we find, we shall have to seek. If we succeed in the race of life it must be by our own energies and our own exertions. Others may clear the road, but we must go forward, or be left behind in the race of life. If we remain poor and dependent, the riches of other men will not avail us. If we are ignorant, the intelligence of other men will do but little for us. If we are foolish, the wisdom of other men will not guide us; if we are wasteful of time and money, the economy of other men will only make our destitution the more disgraceful and hurtful.”**

These wise words gave both Don and Lot impetus to champion the cause of Black Economic Empowerment. If Lot Ndlovu was the St Paul of the BMF cause and Black Economic Empowerment, Don Mkhwanazi was the St Peter: bold, daring, dedicated and unwavering, an unapologetic Drum Major for transformation.

Of Don, Phillip James Bailey would say: “We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts not figures on a dial. We should count time by heart throbs. He most lives who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.”

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Don Mkhwanazi gave ample credence to Mark Twain exhortation: “Let us endeavour so to live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry.”

Don, my brother:

Pioneer in the field of brand management

Trailblazer in marketing management

Flagbearer in corporate change management

Leading light in repositioning and re-profiling the BMF as a significant player in South Africa’s political economy

Champion and major exponent of Black Economic Empowerment

We salute you and pay homage to your lingering legendary stature in South Africa, our beloved country.

Bongani, Ndonga, uyibekile induku ebandla

You lived your life so abundantly

You learned relentlessly

You loved unconditionally

You bequeath a legacy that will linger long

Make your gallant transition to eternity.