



**28 August 2018**

### **Vytjie Mentor through her sister's eyes**

An interview with Martha Nkosi

"I put myself in her shoes, and I think it was nerve-racking to answer questions in front of so many people, especially because it's being broadcast live on TV."

This is the take of Martha Nkosi of the first day of the testimony of her sister, ANC MP Vytjie Mentor, at the commission of inquiry into state capture on Monday, 27 August.

"I think she was nervous in the beginning, but eventually settled in. I found her story coherent... I must say some of the things I know about, because we are very close. Even during the time when she used to work for the ANC... you know when you're coming back from work, sometimes you don't say everything, but you'll say this and that."

Nkosi travelled from Secunda in Mpumalanga with two other people, including her daughter, and they were joined by other family members who came all the way from Kimberly in the Northern Cape, which is where the Mentor family originates. "We are a very big family, "

According to Nkosi, her older sister was unsettled primarily by the magnitude of the process. She describes Vytjie as someone who has never been fazed by working in politics and addressing gatherings of people, and attributes her sister's apparent nervousness at the beginning of her testimony, and her tendency during the cross-examination to admit to memory lapse on certain issues, to the pressure at hand.

"Vytjie takes this very very seriously. An oath for her is like 'I cannot lie before God, I have no reason to lie'. She gets very emotional."

#### **Strong family support**

She remembers the time when Mentor took her oath as a member of Parliament, where she served as chairperson of the ANC caucus from 2004 to 2009. "After she had worked in the Northern Cape and went to Cape Town for the first time and we all went there, it was so emotional, her hand was shivering.

"I understand that the reason she was so shaky is not really that she is overwhelmed by the people watching, but this thing is big. It would be scary for anyone."

Nkosi says Mentor has never doubted that she wants to do the right thing and being part a big family, she can always count on strong support at hand. "What Vytjie knows is that in our family there are people she can always rely on, and others will be the 'backup' who will send messages of support or ask if there's something they can do.

"We do it for everyone, not just her. We even have a family Whatsapp group where we share everything from what our families go through, to religious quotes... it's like our own diary, where we lay our hearts bare."

As Mentor shared during her testimony, she is a teacher by training, as is Nkosi. “My mother was also a teacher, but she left teaching to pursue politics full time. She has always been interested in politics, even when she was a student.”

At that time, Nkosi recalls, it was not easy for their parents. Their father was a policeman, tasked with restoring harmony in the township, so riots were like lawlessness to him. At first Mentor was viewed as a rebel.

“It took my father and the rest of the older generation a long time to understand what Vytjie is in it for. They would ask why she doesn’t just focus on her education.”

### **Understanding at last**

It was only around the 1990s, Nkosi recalls, that they grasped what her sister had been ranting and raving about all that time. “It was during the time of Nelson Mandela’s release and other things, and for the first time they were proud of what Vytjie had been doing.”

Nkosi witnessed her sister making many sacrifices, including spending time with her children, for the sake of her work. “So when someone talks of sacrifice, I understand what they mean because I saw it with my sister.”

Has Vytjie inspired any new generation politicians within the family?

“It’s not so simple for her children, because there have been times when she has feared that her life is in danger, but with my children, they have the freedom to explore. They use my family surname, for instance, and when I ask if they are not scared that people will associate them with their aunt, they say they are actually proud of her.”

### **Solidarity is the key**

After leaving the hearing, the family went off to relax and have a meal together, not necessarily reflecting on the day’s events. “Supporting her means we must take what she takes seriously, because if she needs time, we understand that,” adding that when the time is right, they will leave Mentor to do some reading ahead of her continued testimony on Tuesday.

At the end of Monday’s cross-examination, a number of submissions were added to the commission’s record to reflect disagreements from several parties mentioned in Mentor’s sworn statement. The legal team presented these before commission chair, Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo, for consideration.

As for Nkosi, her being there for her sister is the most important thing right now. She took leave from work to attend because, she says, Vytjie would have absolutely done the same. “Even if I did not have leave days to spare, I would still make it here. Some things are just that important.”

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