

FARE WELL, BELOVED BROTHER
A eulogy for the late Parties Bonginkosi Nyatsumba

Date: Saturday, 11 June 2016

By Kaizer M. Nyatsumba

Programme Director,

Honourable Guests,

Family Members and Friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you very much for your support today and over the past few days, since the sudden and shocking passing away of my beloved younger brother, Parties Bonginkosi Nyatsumba, exactly a week ago today. We appreciate your support and remain deeply indebted to all of you.

As all who knew him will attest, Parties was an ebullient man who lived life to the full. He was a man who was brimful with energy and full of passion for everything that he held dear. He was a courageous man who called a spade a spade, and not a garden implement.

Although wearied by many years of all sorts of struggles on personal, professional and political fronts, the Parties who went to see his doctor last Tuesday was the self-same man that was known to us all over the years. He was generally in fine fettle, and neither moribund nor comatose. Following his doctor's concern about a prolonged cough that doggedly refused to get away and his advice, following an examination of x-ray pictures of his chest, that he should present himself at hospital the following day for admission, Parties was well enough and strong enough to drive himself to Nelspruit Medi-Clinic on Wednesday morning, accompanied by his wife, Sarah. He was again well enough and strong enough to drive the two of them back home after his medical examination, undertaking to return the following day for his hospitalisation.

When he returned to Nelspruit Medi-Clinic on Thursday morning, he was received by a doctor with whom he had studied at Thembeke High School who, upon examining him and his chest x-rays, informed him that he had bilateral lobar pneumonia, which meant that he had pneumonia on both lungs. One of the lungs had an abnormal amount of fluid in it, and this is a medical condition called pleural effusion. According to www.webmd.com, pleural effusion can be caused by a number of medical conditions, among them congestive heart failure, pneumonia, liver disease, renal failure, cancer or pulmonary embolism. The latter condition, pulmonary embolism, is described on that website as "the sudden blockage of a major blood vessel (artery) in the lung, usually

caused by a clot. In most cases, the clots are small and are not deadly, but they can damage the lung. But if the clot is large and stops blood flow to the lung, it can be deadly. Quick treatment could save your life or reduce the risk of future problems.”

The website www.webmd.com also adds that “in most cases pulmonary embolism is caused by a blood clot in the leg that breaks loose and travels to the lungs.”

Given the serious diagnosis, Parties’s fellow Thembeke High alumnus put him on another dose of anti-biotics, in addition to those prescribed by his GP on Tuesday, and asked a colleague of his, cardio-thoracic surgeon Dr J Naude, to drain the fluid from the lungs the following day. Dr Naude performed the procedure in casualty on Friday. Twice I called Parties on Friday morning, and twice I found his phone off. When I called my sister-in-law, she told me that Parties had asked her to visit him in hospital on Saturday, and not on Friday. She had also not been able to make contact with him.

Thanks to my cousin’s daughter, Nondumiso who paid Parties a visit in his ward that afternoon, I was able to talk to Parties that afternoon, through her phone. Speaking with difficulty, almost out of breath, he told me about the fluid drainage procedure that had taken place earlier in the day, and said that the fluid had been sent for laboratory analysis and that the doctor had undertaken to come see him around 5pm with the results. He said that he was feeling much better than he did on Thursday.

Worried that he spoke with difficulty, I asked him if I should call him again after 5pm to hear what the results showed, or if I should do so on Saturday morning. Parties said that he was in pain and advised me to call him on Saturday morning. I said goodbye and wished him a speedy recovery.

Some 20 or 30 minutes later, I called Nondumiso and asked if she had since left the hospital. When she confirmed that she had done so, I told her that I was worried about the fact that Parties spoke with difficulty, stopping to take a breath, and asked her if he was in a serious condition. She confirmed that he did not look well, and I said that we would check with him on Saturday morning and then decide if we should drive to Nelspruit to see him.

Of course, I did not know then – and could not possibly have known – that I had just had my very last conversation with my younger brother. Just after 8am on Saturday morning I was awoken by my wife who told me that Parties was no more.

When we met as a family on Saturday evening, I expressed my suspicion that something must have gone horribly wrong at the hospital with the fluid drainage procedure, and undertook to seek answers from the Medi-Clinic. Indeed, in the course of the day on Monday I called the hospital and spoke to the sister in charge of that ward.

She told me that she was off duty on Friday, but gave me the name of a doctor that she believed had looked after my brother. I called the doctor, but he had no recollection of having treated a Nyatumba. I asked him to check his files and re-acquaint himself with the facts because I would be going to the hospital on Tuesday to demand answers.

By sheer coincidence, that evening I was called by the doctor who had admitted Parties into the ward on Thursday. He introduced himself, told me that he was a year or so behind Parties at Thembeke High School during the mid-1980s, explained Parties's condition to me and the aforementioned medical terms. He told me that he had last seen Parties around 7pm on Friday evening and that, after he had been nebulized, Parties was breathing well when he left for Kiaat Hospital that evening.

He was just as shocked, when he turned his phone on around 5am on Saturday morning as he left Kiaat Hospital and saw a number of missed calls from the sister in charge of Parties's ward, and was told that Parties was no more. When he arrived in the ward, he was told that the Emergency Room doctor had spent about 30 minutes trying to resuscitate Parties, alas, without success. He was declared dead around 4.30am, with pneumonia being the cause of death.

I am grateful to that considerate doctor for the explanation. He said that he had felt a need to explain to a family member what had happened, but could not talk to my sister-in-law, whose contact details were in Parties's file, because of the state that naturally she would have been in. He kept looking for a family member's details until he got my phone number – and called me.

That doctor, ladies and gentlemen, is here with us this morning to pay his last respects to our beloved brother, Parties. He is Dr Bongani Christopher Nkambule. Now, the Nkambules are important relatives of ours. Our mother was Maria Ntombizodwa Nkambule, the daughter of Miso Nkambule and Semia Shakoane. I would like to believe that, having been looked after by a cousin of ours, Dr Nkambule, Parties is at peace with our parents, our grand-parents and our ancestors.

Parties was admitted into Nelspruit Medi-Clinic on Thursday, 2 June and passed away on Saturday, 4 June. Our other late brother, Elphus Mfana Adonis Motha, was said to have "disappeared" on Wednesday, 3 June and his half-burnt body was found in a veld in the GaRankuwa area on Friday, 5 June. The two of them, Parties and Adonis, were charismatic men who were social giants. I am certain that, had we, as a family, had an opportunity to lay Adonis to rest, as many people as we have here this morning would have turned up to bid him farewell from this world.

As most people here will readily concede, Parties was not a perfect man – just like all of us. Like all of us, he was a complex man with his own set of weaknesses and insecurities.

However, unlike most of us, Parties had the courage of his convictions and spoke out fearlessly whenever he had reason to worry that things were going haywire. He was a staunch, life-long socialist who, when I wrote to him from the US years ago to encourage him to work hard in his studies so that he could get a scholarship to study in the USA, replied that he would far prefer to study in the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, instead! Even in these days when communism and socialism have been shown to have failed wherever they have been experimented with, Parties remained a firm believer in true socialism *a la* the Soviet Union. My younger brother believed fervently, to the very end, that “the people shall share in the country’s wealth”.

Despite his imperfections, like all of us, nevertheless my younger brother strongly detested corruption and all those who perpetrate it. However, he did not just whisper in the deep, as Ray Phiri’s Stimela cautioned us not to do. Instead, he spoke out fearlessly and volubly – directly and indirectly, on different platforms, including the media – against corruption and those who perpetrate it. He spoke out even as he knew that doing so would inevitably be held against him by his comrades and, in the process, significantly limit his prospects for professional advancement or high political office. For that, I am immensely proud of him.

Regrettably, over the years my younger brother grew bitter and more frustrated with rampant corruption, cronyism and his perceived political and professional side-lining that he took solace in the bottle. His love affair with the bottle so worried the family that we feared that he might meet his end through somebody’s hand during a drunken brawl or through a car accident. So, while we are sad to lose him, nevertheless we are relieved that he met his death through natural causes and not a knife, a gun or a car accident.

In conclusion, Programme Director, Honourable Guests, Family Members and Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen, I submit humbly that, notwithstanding Parties’s bitterness and frustration as a result of his perceived political and professional ostracization, nevertheless he remained loyal to his beloved organisations, the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party, to the end. Not only did he never once waiver and switch allegiance to another political party or organisation, but he also never even considered that possibility.

In the end, then, these two organisations have every reason to be justly proud of him. He deserved them more than they deserved him and his unswerving loyalty.

Lala ngoxolo, Mfowethu, Parties Bonginkosi "Potlood" Nyatsumba. Lala ngoxolo, Mbezane, Mahlezaphakathi, Mtheth'ozimanga, Ngono, Hlathi!!!

Ends