

466/64 Nelson Mandela      S/Brief from Irene Mkhomo  
19. 11. 69

Our dear Wolegabo,

I was indeed encouraged by the touching message of sympathy you sent me on the occasion of the death of my eldest son, Thembi. Both the printed text of the condolence card, as well as the soothing sentiments you scribbled down next to the text, were singularly appropriate & they did much to inspire me.

I received the tragic news on July 16 when the Busmanaching Officer showed me a telegram which merely reported the bare fact that Thembi had died in a car accident in Cape Town. Immediately upon receiving this report I made efforts to get detailed accurate information on the accident: How did it happen? Did his car capsize or did it collide with another car? Exactly where in Cape Town did the accident occur? How many people were involved? Was death instantaneous or otherwise? Where would he be buried? In Cape Town, Johannesburg or Umhlati?

All these were reasonable questions that every parent would almost instinctively ask. About 10 days later information reached me that the accident had occurred in Jonkers River & that the funeral would take place in Johannesburg. I also learnt for the first time that apart from Thembi, 2 Europeans had died. This deepened my anxiety & concern & I wished to engage the services of a Cape Town firm of attorneys to investigate questions of fault & liability & to advise me on any proceedings that might have to be instituted or opposed by his estate. Four months have elapsed since receiving the news of his death & yet up to the moment of writing, I have not been able to get the bulk of the information I require, nor has it been possible for me to contact a lawyer.

I had also been anxious to attend the funeral & to pay my last respects to Thembi, just as I had been keen to do so in the case of the death of Ma. Though I had never hoped to succeed, my heart ached when I finally realised that I could not be present at the graveside - the one moment in life a parent would never like to miss. Many people who ponder on the problems of the average prisoner tend to concentrate more on the lengthy sentences still to be served, the hard labour to which we are condemned, the coarse & tasteless menus, the grim & tedious boredom that stalks every prisoner & the frightful frustrations of a life in which human beings move in complete circles, launching today exactly at the point where you started the day before. But one of us have had experiences much more painful than these, because these experience at too deeply into ones being, into ones soul. It is not desirable to say more than this: the death of Ma & that of Thembi reminded me of the fact that more than 30 years ago, the British had imprisoned a famous freedom fighter in one of the Colonies, a man who subsequently became Prime Minister when his country gained independence in 1947. He was in jail when his wife's health deteriorated & when it became necessary for him to accompany her to

