

Dube goes to school

A story told to Marita Rademeyer by Advocate Dube Tshidi



Dube Tshidi grew up in Atteridgeville, a township in Gauteng province in the western part of Pretoria. When Dube was a child, there were unjust laws in South Africa that made life very difficult for black people. Black people could not vote in elections, they could not choose where to live, where to go to school or which hospitals to go to. Moms and dads often worked far away from home and could not see their children for months. Black people had to do the hardest work for the least money. They were not treated with respect. Sometimes they were jailed or even killed when they stood up for their rights.

Dube lived with his Mom, Dad, sister and brothers in a very small house made of corrugated iron. They had no kitchen and no bathroom. The family all slept on the floor in one room. In winter they had to huddle together to keep warm because they did not have enough blankets. In summer it was too hot to sleep and the sweat would pour off Dube's little body.

Dube's Mom and Dad couldn't read or write because they never had a chance to go to school. They couldn't write letters or fill in forms, they couldn't read the labels on medicine bottles, there were many things they couldn't do

Dube really, really wanted to go to school. He wanted to learn to read and write and do sums and learn about the world. But his family didn't have money for uniform and school fees. Dube watched the other children in his street going to school in their white shirts and black shorts. He was six years old and he felt his heart was going to burst. He really, really wanted to go to school with the other children.

One day, Dube followed the neighbour and her children all the way to the Catholic school. There were lots of children in their school uniforms and when the bell rang they stood in a line. Dube wasn't wearing school uniform but he stood at the end of the line. He felt scared when he got to the front of the line. There was a tall white man dressed in black. The man looked at him and asked him a question in his language, seSotho: "Do you want to go to school, boy?" Dube had never spoken to a white man. He felt scared but he really, really wanted to go to school. He nodded his head, his eyes as big as saucers. The man said: "Then I will help you to go to school". The man was a Catholic priest called Father Frank. He kept his promise and made a plan for Dube to go to school.

Dube was really, really happy to go to school. Every day he walked two hours to school and two hours to get home – barefoot in summer and in winter. It was a long way but it was worth it. He learned his lessons and practised writing on his slate. (In those days, many black schoolchildren did not get paper to write on – they wrote on small hard blackboards called slates.)

After some time, Dube decided to join Father Frank's church. Every Sunday he walked two hours to church and two hours back. The lessons Dube learnt in church were about loving God and loving our neighbours and speaking the truth. He learnt how even children can help other people. He decided he wanted to follow the example of Christ and spend the rest of his life helping people. When he was twelve years old, Dube had his first communion in the church. Father Frank stood in front of him that day with tears running down his cheeks.

Today, Dube is a grownup man. He's an advocate, a man who helps people who do not have

much power to stand up for themselves. He has spent many years studying at school and university but he says it was Father Frank who taught him the most important lessons in life – lessons he strives to follow every day.



Advocate Dube Tshidi

Dube began studying law in 1991 and has attained the degrees of B.Juris, Bachelor of Law and Master of Law at universities in South Africa and abroad. He grew up in Atteridgeville where he was the first member of his family to enter formal schooling. Dube worked for the Catholic Archdiocese of Pretoria and in the office of the Pope's representative in South Africa. In 1994 he joined the Financial Services Board of South Africa as a junior analyst in the retirement funds division. Today he is the Chief Executive Officer of the Board.