

Hope for daughter lingers, but anguish grows as years pass

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Twenty-three peaceful years went by as Ernestina and Matthew Simelane watched their daughter, Nokuthula (Peaceful One), grow into a confident woman. But their parental pride has been followed by 13 years of anguish after her disappearance in 1983.

Until last week, when the Simelanes were informed that two superintendents from the National Crime Investigation Service in Gauteng had been suspended in connection with Nokuthula's disappearance, they never be-

lieved that anything positive would emerge from their daughter's disappearance.

The news has given them hope that the awful mystery is at last about to be solved.

At the time of her disappearance, Nokuthula worked for the ANC and regularly travelled between South Africa and Swaziland.

She acted as a courier and provided shelter, and was a major communication link between an Umkhonto weSizwe (MK) base in Swaziland and SA.

Nokuthula was apparently sent on two MK missions before

her disappearance. She was sent to Vereeniging and was successful in delivering a message to an operative.

Her next stop was at a house in Soweto. She apparently arrived at the Soweto house, where she was given directions to the Carlton Centre in central Johannesburg, but she never arrived.

NCS spokesman Director Reg Crewe refused to name the two suspended superintendents. "We have to treat them as suspects at this stage," he said.

Today, Nokuthula's picture hangs in the living room of the Simelanes' modest home in Be-

thal, Mpumalanga. She lives in their hearts, even though no one has confirmed that she is still alive. Despite the uncertainty, her parents continue talking about her in the present tense.

"We never lost hope. We miss her a lot and we still want to know the facts," says her mother.

Ernestina recalls how their daughter suddenly stopped calling: "It was quiet until I suspected there was something strange, because every time around September, which is before her birthday, she would call and ask for a present. But this time we didn't hear anything from her."

This was followed by a period of intense searching by the distraught parents as they tried to track down their child.

Ernestina remembers her daughter as a tough girl who could not accept white supremacy and discrimination.

She had completed her BA Social Science degree in Swaziland at the time of her disappearance and was expected to graduate in September, the same month as her birthday.

Ernestina says she has been ill ever since her darling's disappearance, and adds: "I cannot give up on my daughter."