

Tortured Seiso finds a place he can call home

XOLANI MBANJWA

Seiso Ratsone – whose torture by two minors in August last year when he was only 18 months shocked the nation – left Odi Hospital on Tuesday and has been taken under the wings of the Children of Fire charity organisation.

Seiso, now two years and five months, had a successful skin graft at Odi Hospital – where he has been treated for his severe injuries.

His grandmother, Jennifer Ratsone, has thanked the community and doctors and nurses of Ward 4 at Odi Hospital for "everything they've done for my baby".

It is alleged that two boys, aged 11 and 12, poured boiling water on Seiso's private parts, peeled skin off the back of his head and neck and inserted chilli peppers into his rectum, when his grandmother left them playing at their home in Soshanguve.

His grandmother and a group of community members found him under a pile of blankets in the bedroom surrounded by knives. The two boys inside had initially refused to open the door.

The burns covered more than 20% of Seiso's body.

Children of Fire director Bronwen Jones said the organisation had a medical plan for Seiso for the next 10 years.

Seiso would still have to undergo numerous operations and Children of Fire would be a "friend of the court," she said.

"We are arranging Seiso's medical assessment to include plastic surgery, urologists, blood tests, psychologists and everything else he will need.

"We will also provide him with clothes, burn creams and lotions. Seiso will need a lot of attention to recover. If the State health system is overloaded or unwilling to perform some medical procedures we will take him to a private hospital at our expense," said Jones.

She founded the charity in 1996 after seeing the plight of child burn victims in the country. The UK-born engineering geologist and author said Seiso would need "stability, security and love to recover".

"Most importantly, he must not see his assailants ever again. His recovery process is going well. Today (yesterday) he went to the theatre for the first time in his life as

part of a group of burn survivors and enjoyed it a great deal."

Since its establishment, Children of Fire has taken care of more than 200 children who had suffered severe and complicated burns and torture. Jones said they were responsible for the welfare of 55 children, with 12 staying at the organisation at any given time.

Seiso's ear will need to be rebuilt "by taking cartilage from his rib or 'borrowing' it from the other ear and improving the shape of the other ear".

Jones said: "This can involve several operations in childhood and even in adulthood. He will need easing of facial scarring and releasing contractures where the skin has shrunk or pulled too tightly in the wrong position and easing groin contractures.

"He will also need tissue expansion of the scalp to restore missing hair.

"We arrange surgery, therapy, physiotherapy, speech therapy, counselling and special education for the children.

"We also put fun back into their lives. Nineteen of our children have just returned with long-term volunteers from the top of Mount Kilimanjaro.

"We help inventors of safety devices and with disaster relief and fire prevention. We work to raise awareness of injury and fire prevention and help children cope with disability and disfigurement."

Many children in Seiso's position needed justice, she said. "When they look back at their traumatic experience and see that justice was done, then they cope better."

The two boys who allegedly tortured Seiso were charged with attempted murder last year.

On May 17 their court case at the Ga-Rankuwa magistrate's court was postponed to July 31. They have since been kept at a place of safety.

The court ruled that Seiso's family undergo counselling for the trauma they went through. Seiso's grandmother said: "I am very happy to have people like this helping. Seiso has not healed but he is now getting better."

Those wanting to help Children of Fire can call 011 482 4258. To deposit donations: First National Bank Melville, account number 614 920 23919.



Two-year-old Seiso Ratsone at the shelter for victims of fire.

PICTURE: BOXER NGWENYA

Flight risk: no bail for Taliep's wife

FATIMA SCHROEDER

Najwa Petersen climbed into the back of a police van on hands and knees yesterday for her first journey to Pollsmoor Prison. She will remain there until a bed becomes available at Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital.

The Wynberg regional court's had turned down her bail application after she was arrested in connection with the murder of her husband, musician and playwright Taliep Petersen.

The court found that she was a flight risk and may interfere with State witnesses. Also, that since she had a psychiatric disorder, it was unsafe for her and her daughter (8), if she was allowed to go home.

Throughout her bail application, Petersen showed little emotion. But yesterday she wept as she realised that she would remain behind bars for seven months before her trial starts in the Cape high court.

Her request to be sent to Valkenberg for psychiatric observation was granted, despite her having turned down a bed there last week.

In his judgment, regional magistrate Robert Henney said it was of crucial importance that Petersen had attempted to commit suicide while she was in the care of her family and while receiving treatment.

Releasing her on bail would therefore not necessarily eliminate her suicide attempts. There was no evidence to indicate who would take care of her if she was released on bail, he said. While her counsel submitted that her family would care for her, Henney said that patients like her needed trained people to do so.

He described as "unacceptable" the defence's argument that the conditions inside prison were not sufficient for patients suffering from

mental illnesses. "It would mean that people with mental illnesses can never be detained because of the conditions there," he said.

The magistrate agreed with State psychiatrist Larissa Panieri-Peter that at home, there was a greater chance that she would harm herself.

Referring to Petersen's claim that her daughter needed her after her father's murder, Henney said that the accused was barely able to look after herself, "let alone a child".

She was suicidal, so the child should not be exposed to that.

The fact that Petersen did not seek help for her traumatised daughter was inconsistent with someone who had the best interest of her child at heart, he said.

There was also evidence that both Petersen and her co-accused Rasiet Emjedi posed a flight risk.

Emjedi did not satisfy the court that he had a fixed address and Petersen had strong ties in Namibia, where she also held a bank account.

The magistrate said he found it "strange" that she requested that the claim she had put in on her daughter's behalf for Petersen's life insurance be paid into the foreign account even though she professed to have no desire to move there.

Henney also said that there was a likelihood that Petersen and Emjedi would interfere with State witnesses. The State's star witness, Faheem Hendricks was in protective custody, but there were other witnesses known to both of them.

Magistrate Henney said he also sensed the anger, shock and disbelief of those people who filled the public gallery during the bail application. This indicated that granting them bail would disturb the public order.

Petersen will appear again on August 10. Emjedi, Waheed Hassan and Jefferson Tion Snyders will appear in court on August 17.

Cops probe claims of more baby killings

GRAEME HOSKEN
CRIME REPORTER

She is supposed to have helped to bring babies into the world, but instead a 50-year-old Mamelodi midwife is alleged to have killed dozens of newborn and unborn infants.

The woman was arrested on Tuesday, a day after a 34-year-old Pretoria mother and her aunt were arrested at their home in the township for allegedly murdering and burying her infant children in shallow graves in her backyard with the help of the midwife.

The midwife and the aunt are alleged to have helped the mother deliver her daughter last Friday. It is alleged that they then drowned the baby in a bucket of water before burying her.

The women cannot be named until they have appeared in court.

Detectives from Mamelodi West police

station, the Forensic Unit and the SAPS K9 Search and Rescue Unit this week unearthed the infant girl and the skeleton of her sibling, who was apparently buried in June last year.

All three are being held at Pretoria Central Prison until their formal bail application next Wednesday.

They apparently confessed to the murders before a Mamelodi magistrate this week.

The women are facing two charges of murder and two of concealment of birth.

Yesterday police revealed that they were investigating allegations that the midwife had illegally been performing abortions and helping other Mamelodi mothers abort their children and bury them in and around the township.

Police spokesperson Inspector Paul Ramaloko confirmed that they were investigating allegations that the woman was

involved in similar incidents to which she had confessed.

"We came across these allegations through our investigations," he said when asked if police had been tipped off by members of the community.

Ramaloko said that the midwife was alleged to have charged R800 and more to perform the procedures.

He confirmed that police were looking into the possibility that there were more bodies buried in Mamelodi and said that the exhumations would be guided by the investigation.

Ramaloko declined to say how many other babies were involved, saying investigations would reveal all.

"At this stage the woman is being questioned by detectives. We are hoping for a breakthrough soon.

"If the information and allegations prove to be correct, then the woman will face additional charges," he said.

FIVE-DAY FORECAST FOR PRETORIA

Today	Sat 14th	Sun 15th	Mon 16th	Tue 17th
3 20	3 20	2 20	1 22	1 21

TOMORROW'S WEATHER

Call Weatherline at 082 162 www.weathersa.co.za

PRETORIA Fine

Wind: LIGHT SE
UVB (sunburn risk) THURS 12 JULY MOD
SUNRISE: 6:53
SUNSET: 17:32
MOONRISE: NEW MOON JULY 14 14:05

ADVISORY: Wave heights in excess of 5m between Cape Columbine and East London, spreading to Durban by evening. Very cold and windy conditions are expected to persist on the northern high ground of the W Cape, the extreme southern part of the N Cape as well as northern interior of the E Cape. Weather conditions favourable for runaway fires are expected over the entire KwaZulu-Natal as well as Mpumalanga and Limpopo Lowveld areas.

MAIN CITIES Minimum Maximum °C

Johannesburg	2	19	5	21
Polokwane	2	18	5	21
Nelspruit	2	18	5	21
Mafikeng	1	19	5	21
Bloemfontein	-4	17	5	21
Kimberley	-3	18	5	21
Cape Town	9	19	6	20
Port Elizabeth	6	20	6	20
Durban	7	20	6	20

WORLD TEMPERATURES Minimum Maximum °C

Amsterdam	14	20	Rain	Cairo	17	36	Clear	Paris	13	20	Rain
Athens	20	31	Clear	Chicago	14	24	Rain	Perth	12	20	Cloudy
Auckland	5	13	P/Cloudy	Geneva	9	22	P/Cloudy	Rome	16	27	P/Cloudy
Barcelona	20	25	P/Cloudy	Lisbon	19	30	P/Cloudy	Sydney	8	17	P/Cloudy
Beirut	23	30	P/Cloudy	London	14	21	P/Cloudy	Taipei	27	33	Rain
Berlin	11	18	Rain	Mecca	25	43	Clear	Tel Aviv	20	33	P/Cloudy
Brussels	13	20	Rain	New York	17	28	P/Cloudy	Tokyo	23	26	Rain

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Lion owner offers to pay boy's family

SAPA

The owner of 10 lions that killed a boy had offered to sell two of the animals to compensate the child's family, North West authorities said yesterday.

North West agriculture, conservation and environment MEC Mandlenkosi Mayisela said Tommy Van Vuuren realised that money could not make up for the loss of a life, "but he has offered to sell a male and a female lion and the money accrued would go to the mother."

"Tshepo Gaerupe (9) was killed by the lions on a farm near Vryburg.

The lions apparently grabbed the boy and pulled him into their enclosure after he put his hand through a gap near the entrance gate on June 17.

Only a piece of his skull remained. Mayisela said his department confiscated the lions on Tuesday following a report on an investigation conducted at the farm.

"The report said that Mr Van Vuuren did not have a valid permit, it had expired. The infrastructure was not up to what was required, specifically with regard to the gate where the boy was grabbed," he said.

On Wednesday, Van Vuuren lodged an application at the high court in Mmabatho demanding the lions be returned to him. The court found in his favour.

Van Vuuren then offered the price of the two lions – about R700 000 – to the family.

A week after the incident Van Vuuren improved the fencing around the enclosure and applied for the renewal of his permit.

The Wildlife Unit of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals yesterday called for the welfare of the lions to be considered.

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