Family, friends, colleagues, learners past and present, and all who loved him,

thank you for gathering with us to celebrate the life of my brother, Thabo Michael Maseko — our Tabs.

I stand here as Lerato, his younger sister,

the one he taught to cross busy streets in Orlando West by holding my hand steady and saying,

“Courage is just kindness walking forward.”

Tabs lived that lesson so completely that it became the way our family moved through life.

He was born on 5 July 1982 in Soweto,

the son of Nomsa and the late Sibusiso Maseko.

He passed away on 10 April 2026 at the age of 43.

Those are the borders on the page.

Inside them is the story of a boy raised in Orlando West,

who would grow into a man determined to make every child feel seen, safe and

capable.

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He matriculated at Morris Isaacson — a school with a history that expects courage from its learners.

Tabs never forgot that.

At Wits he trained to be a teacher,

not because it was convenient,

but because he believed classrooms are where futures are negotiated with hope.

He began teaching history in Braamfontein,

turning syllabuses into journeys where dates had voices and ideas had consequences.

Later, he became a deputy principal,

and gave his fullest energy to learner support —

the quiet work of noticing when a child’s eyes start slipping from the page,

of calling a parent before worry hardens into fear,

of building Saturday maths clubs and literacy programmes so that no one is left behind simply because the week was too short.

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If you ask his colleagues what they will miss,

they will name his laugh first —

that big, rolling sound that started in his chest and filled the staffroom like a bell at break time.

But they will also speak about his calm

— the way he could walk into a tense meeting,

pour two cups of tea,

ask three fair questions,

and suddenly there was space for everyone to breathe.

If you ask his learners,

they will tell you that Sir Maseko never gave up on anyone.

He remembered first names,

nicknames,

and the names you wished for yourself.

He kept a small notebook in his jacket pocket —

not marks or deadlines, but dreams:

“Doctor,” “mechanic,” “graphic designer,” “midfielder,” “journalist,”

written next to initials.

He would check the list as though he were studying a map.

“Okay, let’s plot the route,” he’d say.

Then he’d open a door:

a bursary form,

a remedial class,

a conversation that didn’t end when the bell rang.

My favourite memory is not in a classroom at all,

but on those crisp Saturday mornings at the soccer field,

coaching the under-15s.

The pitch was often uneven,

the cones borrowed,

the ball a little soft by the second game.

But Tabs treated that ground like a stadium.

He knew every child’s dream and every child’s nickname:

“Professor, you’re on the wing today — show me what that mind of yours can

see.”

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“Grootman, lead the line and talk to your midfield.”

“Smiley, track back — you can do hard things and still keep that grin.”

And when a shoulder drooped after a missed chance,

he would jog over and crouch to eye level.

“Your mistake is not you,” he would say.

“Your next touch is you.”

The boy would nod — sometimes reluctantly — and then try again.

That was Tabs’s gift:

he turned courage into something ordinary and useable.

He loved community soccer,

and he loved his church choir — that steady baritone that could anchor a hymn.

He loved reading South African biographies,

dog-eared and underlined, with small notes in the margins —

“integrity here,” “hard choices,” “service over shine.”

And he loved those Saturday market runs,

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coming home with a loaf he’d insist was “the best in Johannesburg,”

some fresh spinach for the week,

and a bunch of flowers that somehow always ended up in the kitchen

before the groceries did.

At home he was husband to Zinhle,

and father to Kamohelo, twelve,

and Litha, nine.

He kept his commitments as carefully as he kept his diary.

On weeknights he would leave the bag by the door,

drop to the floor to build a Lego goalpost,

or help untangle the mystery of long division.

He listened.

He asked the follow-up question.

He would tell the story behind a struggle rather than just naming the struggle.

And on Sunday afternoons he would sing while he ironed school shirts, because why not add a bit of bass to the steam.

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To our mother, Nomsa,

Tabs was the first to phone in the morning and the last to check in at night.

To our late father, Sibusiso,

he was the proud echo of the values that raised us:

ubuntu,

integrity,

fairness,

and the stubborn belief that education changes futures.

To me, he was the brother who walked me to school,

who edited my essays late at night with a red pen that somehow never felt sharp,

who stood at my side at graduations and hospital visits,

anchor and accompanist.

In leadership he was principled without being rigid.

He could hold a line and also hold a hand.

When the school grappled with hard decisions,

he insisted on fairness that was visible, not whispered.

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He would remind us:

“If a policy embarrasses someone before it uplifts them, rewrite it.”

And then he would sit with the draft, patient as always,

making sure the quietest voice in the room had been heard.

Tabs did not collect accolades;

he collected moments of trust.

A learner who came back years later to say,

“You kept me in school, Sir.”

A parent who said,

“I thought we were out of options until you phoned.”

A colleague who found his tea already poured on a rough day,

with the simple instruction,

“Drink, then decide.”

We are not here today only to mourn what we have lost,

though we feel that loss in a hundred ways —

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in the silence where a laugh should be,

in the staffroom chair pulled back a little,

in a Saturday morning that forgets it is supposed to smell like damp grass and hope.

We are here to return thanks for what we were given.

We were given a man whose patience mentored more than his words did.

We were given a teacher who understood that history is not distant —

that our children are writing it daily with their choices,

and that our job is to stock their pens with courage and kindness.

We were given a deputy principal who believed support is not a department,

it is a posture.

We were given Tabs.

To Zinhle,

there are not enough formal words for the way you and Tabs built a home that welcomed others.

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Your partnership taught our family that love is both gentle and organised,

both laughter and logistics.

To Kamohelo and Litha,

your dad’s belief in you is permanent.

When you hear a whistle on a windy morning,

when you open a book and a sentence lights up,

when you sing the low note and it steadies the room,

that’s a little of him, close by, reminding you to take your next touch.

To the St John’s Church community,

our family thanks you for the meals, the prayers, the soft knock on the door,

and the practical compassion that has held us through these days.

You have made ubuntu tangible.

We would like you to know that a scholarship fund in Tabs’s name

will support matric learners from Soweto.

It feels right that even now,

he will be sending young people forward —

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through the door he held open every day of his life.

People have asked what they can hold on to as they leave today.

Perhaps this:

Tabs believed in small consistencies over grand gestures.

A phone call returned.

A name learned properly.

A rule explained, not merely enforced.

A second chance offered with eye contact.

A Saturday morning given to maths practice because potential deserves witnesses.

If we take those habits with us,

he will keep working in the places he loved.

When I think of him now,

I do not only see the cap on the soccer field or the tie in the office.

I see a man walking through Orlando West with a bag of books and a bunch of

flowers,

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greeting neighbours by name,

stopping to tie a shoelace that is not his own,

laughing at a joke that needed a generous audience,

and quietly counting the dreams he promised to remember.

Tabs,

my protective brother,

you taught me to be brave without hardness,

to be kind without naivety,

to make room around the table,

and to keep the kettle close to the truth.

I will miss our long debriefs on a Thursday night.

I will miss the way you said, “It’s fixable,”

and then produced a plan that involved tea, time, and patience.

But more than missing, I will keep going in the way you showed me.

I think all of us will.

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May we leave today carrying what you carried:

ubuntu that breathes,

integrity that does not need applause,

fairness that can be explained to a child,

and the unshaken belief that education — in school, at home, in church, on the field — changes futures.

Thank you, Tabs, for every morning you turned into a chance,

for every learner you turned toward themselves,

for every laugh that loosened a tight day,

for every steady word you lent to the rest of us.

We celebrate your life with gratitude.

We release you with love.

And we will honour you in the most accurate way you taught us:

by believing in one another and acting like it.

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