

Helen Joseph



By : Kanushi

BRIEF HISTORY OF HER LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Helen Joseph was a brave South African who fought against apartheid, a system of unfair treatment based on race. Because of her work, she was often threatened, banned, and kept under house arrest for years, but she never gave up.

ROLE, ACHIEVEMENTS AND LEGACY

She helped start the African national Congress (ANC) Women's League and helped organize a big women's protest in 1956 at the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Today, her house in Johannesburg is a national heritage site, and her name is remembered through schools, roads, and hospitals.

WHY SHE INSPIRES ME

Helen inspires me because she used her privilege to stand up for others and she was not silent when it would have been easier to be.



Here is a photo of me standing next to the statue of Helen at the freedom fighter park near Canal Walk :



HELEN JOSEPH (1905-1992)

Founding Member of the South African Congress of Democrats (1953)
Founding member of the Federation of South African Women, Co-leader of the 1956 Women's March, 1956 Treason Trialist

British-born Helen Joseph was a champion of Black rights who was regularly victimised by the South African government for her involvement with various liberation organisations.

She became politically active in her forties in some of the largest anti-Apartheid protests of the day. She helped found the South African Congress of Democrats and was one of the speakers who read out clauses from the Freedom Charter at the Congress of the People in Kliptown in 1955. She took a leading part, together with Lillian Ngoyi, in organising the 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings in Pretoria, which drew 20,000 women from around the country.

Joseph became the voice of the banned people of South Africa after she was put under house arrest in 1963 for a period of five years. She became the first white woman to be given this form of punishment. In a moving article 'Cry of the Banished', Joseph painted a grim picture of the plights suffered under this inhumane law. She endured a series of bans throughout her life, with the final ban only being lifted when she was 80.

“ And the banished man must go, taking nothing but what he can carry in his hands, leaving his home unprotected, his family unprovided for. He must go—and he knows not where nor for how long. ”

— Helen Joseph, 'Cry of the Banished', Africa Today, Vol 10, Nr 1, January 1963

Did You Know?
Joseph requested in her will to be buried in Soweto's Avalon Cemetery next to her friend Lillian Ngoyi. The double grave has since become a site of pilgrimage and a key heritage attraction.

Helen Joseph under house arrest, behind the gate of her home in Norwood, Johannesburg, 5 October 1963 © Jan Haack / Argus / Gallo Images.

Artist | Zaida Stroud
Foundry | Sculpture Casting Services

Full story at www.nhmm.co.za

NATIONAL HERITAGE MONUMENT

An abstract, painterly background with vibrant colors. On the left, there are deep blue and teal strokes. In the center and right, there are bold, wavy strokes of magenta and pink, with some yellow and orange tones at the top right. The overall effect is dynamic and expressive, resembling a watercolor or acrylic painting. The text 'Thank You' is written in a white, elegant cursive script across the middle of the image.

Thank You