

GERALD NORMAN MORTEL

02/02/1941 – 09/01/2018

by Margaret Thebus

Gerald Morkel was a pioneering political leader. He was elected Premier of the Western Cape in 1999, and headed the first coalition government in democratic South Africa.

He was also active in local politics, serving on the Cape Town City Council and as mayor of the city.



Gerald Norman Morkel was born in Harfield Village Cape Town on 2nd February 1941 and passed away on 9th February 2018. He was the eldest of two sons born to Hercules and Isabel Morkel, nee Robertson

Gerald and his brother Clifford were still very young when their mother passed away after contracting Tuberculosis. Hercules, his brother Gerald and their sisters Margaret and Mary were the only siblings living in Cape Town. The remainder of their family, their parents and siblings were still in Beaufort West. The two brothers were sent to Cape Town to avoid being drafted into the army and their sisters were sent there as well due to a shortage of work in Beaufort West. Their father, Samuel had been placed under house arrest as he was deemed to be a German sympathizer, primarily because of his German surname and heritage.

Following Isabel's death, Margaret gave up her job, moved in to Isabel's Mother's home and took over the care of Gerald and Clifford for a few years until their father re-married Ann Pieterse. This marriage produced another five brothers and three sisters. Frank, Peter, Michael, Dennis, Samuel, Priscilla, Annalise and Charmaine. The Hercules Morkel family lived on acreage in the suburb of Grassy Park for many years.

Gerald married Hazel Roberts and following the birth of their eldest son Garth, they lived in a "granny flat" next door to Margaret and her family in Retreat before moving into a rented Council house in the Cape Town suburb of Steenberg.

After completing an apprenticeship as a carpenter he began working as a builder, knocking on doors and asking if there was anything that needed fixing. He then met an architect who asked him to build a holiday home for someone in Betty's Bay. This led to more orders for homes in that region. He assembled a crew of about 20 and started a business called Morkel Builders. He became relatively wealthy and moved out of the rented council house in Steenberg and built a triple storey house in Retreat.

He became well known and popular in the largely coloured community, and built his subsequent political career on its strong and unflagging support. He had always enjoyed talking politics and when he was asked to help a business associate campaign for the Coloured Persons Representative Council, he became interested in a political career for himself.

In 1978, and with a love of cricket which he was good at, he joined the Cape Town Cricket Club after coloured people were allowed to apply for permits to play for white clubs. Gerald played for the second team and got involved in the club's administration, where he felt he helped to remove apartheid from the game.

In 1983 he entered the new Tricameral Parliament (as a member of the (coloured) Labor Party. He said that for all its faults he believed it offered a chance to engage with and influence the government for the benefit of the coloured community.

“The Tricameral Parliament was the name given to the South African parliament and its structure from 1984 to 1994, established by the South African Constitution of 1983. While still entrenching the political power of the White section of the South African population (or, more specifically, that of the National Party) (NP), it did give a limited political voice to the country's Coloured and Indian population groups. The majority Black population group was still however excluded.”

As individuals we all, at times, experience difficult periods in our lives, whether on a personal level, or a professional one. Gerald was no different. The personal struggles to make ends meet and provide for his family is something we all face. In a politically diverse country as South Africa was and to a certain extent still is, there was conflict within his own family regarding their individual political alliances. Gerald stayed true to himself and what he believed in. Gerald said his sons have always had a “free rein” to decide to which party they want to belong. “Never once were they asked to join the party I was in,” In fact, he added, he had advised them not to enter politics.

He said the political rivalries never spill over into the family's regular get-togethers. At home it is very pleasant, we will rag each other with “What did the ANC say today, what did the DA say today, but nothing serious, because my wife doesn't allow it. The big thing we discuss is sport. Half of the family are Liverpool supporters, and the other half Manchester United supporters. It's a very big rivalry

In 2001 Gerald was stripped of his premiership following his alleged friendship and business involvement with Jurgen Harksen.

Gerald resigned as Mayor and Provincial Leader but continued to serve Cape Town City as a Councillor for his Steenberg/Retreat Constituency until 2011 when he was diagnosed with stomach cancer.

After a long battle with the illness, Gerald passed away on 9th January 2018
He is survived by his wife Hazel, children and grandchildren

Following his death in January 2018, a statement by Michael Mpofu, the spokesperson for the current Premier, Helen Zille, said “Gerald was elected Premier in 1999, and headed the first coalition government in democratic South Africa – pioneering a form of government that is now established throughout South Africa.

In his role as leader of the Democratic Alliance in the Western Cape, he was on the front line of some of the Party’s toughest survival struggles when many of his colleagues defected, first to the New National Party and then to the ANC.

History has vindicated his foresight in the decisions he took during that most difficult time. Gerald entered politics in support of an independent candidate in the apartheid era Coloured Representative Council.

In 2001 Gerald is quoted as saying: ‘I suppose the Political bug bites in a family like ours. Even my grandfather was involved in politics in the old days in Beaufort West. I suppose it runs in the blood’.

August 2018

TIMELINE

Name: Gerald Norman Morkel

Date of Birth: 2nd February 1941

Date of Death: 9th January 2018

Married: Hazel Roberts

Private Business Enterprise: Morkel Builders

Political Timeline:

- 1983/4: Entered the new tricameral parliament as a Member of the coloured Labour Party
- 1994: Defected to the National Party in the run-up to the 1994 general Election
- 1998: He was chosen as the National Party’s Western Cape leader and took office as Premier in May, succeeding Hernus Kriel

- 1999: Elected as Premier. The Amalgamation of the NATS who became the New National Party formed a coalition with the Democratic Party with Gerald remaining as Premier.
- 2000: Plans began to prepare an amalgamation of the two parties under the name Democratic Alliance.
- 2001: The New National Party withdrew from the arrangement and joined the ANC. Gerald attempted to turn the majority of the NNP against the ANC and failed and he was forced to resign as Premier. He was subsequently elected as Mayor of Cape Town. He remained in office for less than a year, until the Democratic Alliance was ousted from power. For a while He served as Western Cape Provincial Leader of the Democratic Alliance but later stepped down and continued as a member of the City Council of Steenberg until his retirement from politics in 2011