THREE ACCIDENTS CHANGED MY LIFE

The grey brick house with a beautiful view of the winding valleys below looks out of sorts next to the pink rondavels dotted on top of the hill.

The prosthetic leg and the black wheelchair also seem inappropriate next to bleating calves and cackling chickens.

This is Mthunzi Shozi’s homestead of Mlamuli in Foksen outside Port Shepstone on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast, where the 67-year-old grandfather has “relocated full time” after a motor vehicle accident in Durban three years ago cost him his leg.

And all these items, including the newly-built house with gold voile curtains and shining tiles, were bought from proceedings of Shozi’s settlement from the Road Accident Fund (RAF).

With a wry smile glowing beneath his grey beard, Shozi tells how he survived three motor vehicle accidents which left him with one crooked leg and a prosthetic leg. He also speaks about how the RAF has been by his side ensuring that he gets all the help he needs, but also mentions his attempts to obtain compensation for another accident involving an illegally operating taxi.

“Yes, I survived three car accidents,” he says without the bravado associated with rappers who often boast about how many times they have been shot and are still breathing.

Sitting next to his wife of 38 years in the new four-roomed house, Shozi tells of the accident that left him “crippled” and spiralled his life down the valley of depression and self-destruction. “I was on my way to work in umlazi (in Durban) one morning when the vehicle I was in collided with another vehicle. Even to this day, I can’t explain how the taxi missed my damaged leg (injured in a previous accident) and smashed the good leg. It hit the side of the leg that was not injured, missed it and smashed my good leg,” he says pointing to the prosthetic leg.

The last of his three motor vehicle accidents was devastating to him. “It changed my life. I did not just stop working after 20 years, but...”
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I also lost my leg. Doctors tried to keep it after I told them I did not want it removed, but the damage was just too severe. It was a very long process, months in hospital and self-doubt on my part.”

The grandfather of two says his struggle to walk comfortably is due to his other “damaged leg” and not the prosthetic leg. “Maybe if the injury was to the other leg it would not have been so bad. The leg is a scrap,” says Shozi, adding that he has a constant fear of falling whenever he uses his prosthetic leg instead of a wheelchair.

Despite normal challenges of using a prosthetic leg, Shozi says the RAF has done a lot for him.

“I’ve had three accidents, as you know, but the RAF only paid for two: the first and the last. When I tried to claim for the second accident, I was told that the taxi I was in was operating illegally, so I have no claim.”

How is that possible? I think it is unfair to penalise passengers for something like this. Does it mean passengers need to check the validity of operating licenses before boarding a taxi? Please assist,” he says to RAF executives and other stakeholders visiting his home.

Shozi is one of a growing number of direct claimants and he has no regrets about choosing this route instead of claiming through attorneys.

“I’ve seen a lot of my brothers being robbed by lawyers. I claimed directly and I got compensated, and I would advise any road accident victim to do the same, because the process is not really difficult. If an old man like me can claim directly and get compensated, surely anyone can do it,” says Shozi.

He says he has come a long way from his days of depression and heavy drinking. “Life has changed. For example, my brother stays just down the road.” He points to his brother’s house just a stone’s throw away from his gate, “but all of a sudden I could not visit him. I could not go to town and do things for myself.

I wonder if the RAF can help me with my other claim,” he says with a smile.

“Kodwa iRAF ingsni kakhulu and ngibonga kakhulu ngakho konke eningenzele kodwa (The RAF has helped me a lot and I am very grateful for what you have done for me).

“Ngiubone abafowethu abaningi beqhunyiswa abameli (I’ve seen a lot of my brothers being robbed by lawyers).

“In addition to helping me with the wheelchair and the leg, the money I got I used to build this beautiful house you see. It is not finished yet; the RAF says it will also assist with a bathroom that is suitable for someone in my condition.

After the accident, I was drinking a lot, but all that is in the past. I knew something was wrong and I addressed it with my ancestors,” says Shozi with about half-a-dozen iziphandla (a goat or cow hide used as bangles for traditional ceremonies).

“My life is not perfect; there are many things I still wanted to do for myself and my family, but am not able to do. I’m just happy the RAF has been able to help me realise some of those dreams. I want to say ‘thank you’ to everyone who was and continues to be by my side throughout this difficult journey, especially your ladies who help with everything I need,” he says as he looks down to his small kraal where his two grandchildren are busy chasing calves as the sun sets.