



THE CAMP

Marius Pienaar's shoes and fishing rod were found at Nina Fishing Camp on the banks of the Zambezi River.



THE VICTIM

Zambian police say Marius Pienaar was hit on the head, had his throat slit and was thrown into the Zambezi.



THE SEARCH

The search for Marius went on for days before he was found in the river. INSET: The entry on Nicky Rossouw's Facebook page with the news that the body had been found. Nicky is among the three people facing charges of murdering Marius.



THE SUSPECTS

Estie Pienaar, the victim's wife, and Nicky Rossouw, owner of Nina Fishing Camp, are now behind bars in Zambia. Mulumbwa Nyambe, who works for Nicky, has also been arrested in connection with Marius' death.



THE JAIL

The tiny prison in Sesheke, 200 km west of Livingstone, where the suspects are being held. It has four cells and prisoners share pit toilets.

GRISLY END TO A LOVE TRIANGLE



YOU's Gloria Edwards talks to murder suspects at stinking Zambian jail after slain man is found in croc-infested river

EXHAUSTION and uncertainty have left deep lines on her face and her eyes are bloodshot. Her auburn hair is pulled into a tight ponytail and she's not wearing any make-up. It seems she's lost weight because her black jacket and pants are loose on her. It's hard to believe this terrified and seemingly defenceless woman stands accused of brutally murdering her husband with the help of two accomplices – then tossing his body to crocodiles in the Zambezi River. "They're treating me okay and I get food. But it's very bad in this place," Estie Pienaar (33) says.

She's referring to Sesheke Prison, 200 km west of Livingstone in Zambia. She's been in custody here since the body of her husband, Marius Pienaar (50), was found on 30 June. An autopsy revealed he'd been hit over

the head and his throat had been slit before he was thrown into the water.

She shares a tiny cell with three women. The toilet is a hole in the ground and the smell of maize porridge and human excrement hangs heavy in the air.

She keeps shaking her head as I try to probe events and ask her about claims that she and her late husband's friend Nicky Rossouw are in a relationship.

"I've just lost my husband," she keeps repeating. "God knows what really happened... The truth will come out."

Then she turns around and walks away, back to the stinking, dark cell.

AWORKER at Nina Fishing Camp came across Marius' abandoned shoes on the banks of the Zambezi River on 26 June and immediately raised the alarm. Soon afterwards his

fishing rod was found in the water nearby.

It was thought a crocodile had dragged the Phalaborwa mine technician into the river. Estie, with whom he was on a fishing holiday, said she'd last seen him the previous night.

According to Marius' family in SA she SMSed them to say how shocked she was. Nicky (58), Marius' friend and owner of the fishing camp, was in tears when he phoned a friend in Namibia to tell her of the incident.

The police searched for five days before finding the body washed up on the river bank.

Nicky broke the news on his Facebook page on 1 July. "Just want to say thank you so much to everyone who called with supportive words and helped me through this situation. We found Marius last night, body still in one piece with no croc damage."

Estie replied with "A thousand thank yous to you, Nicky, and everyone, x x x."

But the autopsy told a different story. According to the Zambian police it's likely Marius was asleep when he was hit over the head and his throat was slit. "We found blood spatters on the boards of his bed and they've already been sent to a hospital in Lusaka for testing," police spokesman Commander Fanwell Siandenge says.

Only after being attacked was he thrown into the water, apparently in the hope that hungry crocodiles would destroy the evidence. They didn't – but crabs had begun to rip pieces of flesh off his face.

Nicky, Estie and a member of Nicky's staff, Mulumbwa Nyambe, have been arrested on charges of murder.

Zambian police have since revealed Estie and Nicky admitted during questioning to being in a relationship and that Nicky had plans to marry her. But they insisted they'd had nothing to do with Marius' death.

Marius and Estie, a former tour operator from Ruimsig, Joburg, were married last August. "Marius was a wonderful man. He's the last person who should have died like that," a friend says. "He was so excited about the wedding and even contacted me the previous night to say his life starts tomorrow."

She says the couple met a few years ago in Livingstone. Marius had worked for Sasol in Secunda and a mining company in Phalaborwa before moving six years ago to Zambia, where he worked at a copper mine north of Solwezi.

Marius didn't have regular contact with his family. His brother, Dr Christo Pienaar, lives in KwaZulu-Natal and his parents stay in Klerksdorp, North West.

He was married before and has an adult

daughter, Jeandre. After his death she wrote on his Facebook wall, "Are there any of my dad's friends in Zambia who can send us [his family and friends] any more information? No one knows what's going on because we're not hearing from Estie."

THE village of Sesheke is a far cry from the romantic images you see in brochures advertising Zambian tourist resorts. There's only one road and a few corrugated iron and brick buildings where you can buy street food and cheap clothing. Everything is covered in dust.

The prison consists of four green cells that resemble shipping containers. Men and women are held separately. The aroma of porridge cooking wafts from a dilapidated building. The area is fenced off and we count eight guards.

After Estie cut short our conversation and walked off I appeal to everyone within earshot for a chance to speak to Nicky. He comes over to the fence, dressed in shorts and a T-shirt. Like Estie he appears tired and dirty.

"It's bad in the prison but I'm still coping with it," he says. He looks more at ease than Estie and speaks more calmly.

Their attorney has instructed them not to discuss the case against them with anyone. But before we say our goodbyes he says, "We'll be pleading not guilty."

The three accused have been officially charged with murder in a Sesheke court. If convicted they could be sentenced to death although there's a moratorium on executions.

Meanwhile they have to contend with the hell of sharing a cramped cell equipped with only one open-pit toilet. ■

ZAMBIAN EXECUTIONS

Since Zambia gained independence in 1964, 53 people have been hanged. However there has been a moratorium on implementing the death penalty since 1997 when eight men were executed. Zambian president Michael Sata refuses to sign execution warrants, choosing instead to commute sentences to 20 to 50 years' imprisonment.

Activists have campaigned for the scrapping of the death penalty but courts still impose it. In the past six months alone 17 people have been sentenced to death for murder and armed robbery.

SOURCES: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, TIMES OF ZAMBIA



Sunday newspaper Rapport's report on the murder.

