



LEFT: Patricia de Lille is mourning the loss of her husband, Edwin de Lille. He died in February after a long illness.
ABOVE: With Edwin, their son, Alistair, and her mother, Gertrude Lindt.

Then he smiled at her and closed his eyes. By the time the paramedics arrived it was too late.

THE past few weeks have been a blur for Patricia. The funeral, calls with her four sisters and Carmen Lindt (52), her daughter from an earlier relationship who lives in George, visits from family, friends stopping by with dishes of food.

For almost 50 years Eddie was her rock, the quiet, unassuming man who was happy to fade into the background so she could enjoy the full blaze of the spotlight.

"He really supported me," she says. "If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have been able to achieve what I have achieved."

She tells us she and Eddie met during a night out in Bellville near Cape Town.

"I used to love dancing and a mutual friend introduced me to him."

Although he was quiet and contained – in short, the complete opposite of her – there was a connection and by the end of 1972 they were married.

A few years later, working as a laboratory assistant at a paint factory, Patricia became involved in the South African Chemical Workers Union as a shop steward, and from that point there was no looking back.

She loved bouncing ideas off her husband.

"My views are more social democrat while he was a bit more conservative. I sometimes used to try to upset him because I wanted to hear his views."

She says Eddie hated politics and wasn't keen to attend functions with her. She recalls taking him to the opening of parliament many years ago.

"Straight after the State of Nation address he came to me and said, 'Where are the car keys? I'm going home. I can't stand this.'"

But that didn't mean he didn't follow her career with an eagle eye.

"Every afternoon he'd buy the newspaper. Sometimes there'd be something about me on the front page, and when I got home he'd ask, 'What's this nonsense again?' And I'd say, 'Calm down, I've got it under control.'"

She's grateful he was willing to give her the space to do what she needed to do.

"I always used to say, 'If you're going to wait for me, you're going to die of hunger. And I was very happy because he took over the running of the household.'"

'When I'm lying in bed I can still hear his breathing – it's so strange'

having so much spare time is overwhelming.

The nights are the worst, she tells us. "I still sometimes get up to go to see what he's doing and when I'm lying in bed I can still hear his breathing. It's so strange."

But now more than ever she knows she needs to stay strong. It's what her husband would have wanted.

"I must just carry this," she says stoically. "Eddie wouldn't want me to be morbid and sad." ■



At her desk in her home office, where she has worked for much of the past year because of lockdown.

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Patricia says when she came home late at night there was always a plate of food waiting for her. Eddie liked making curry and pastas, she says. But most of all he loved looking after his wife.

The only thing that sometimes exasperated him was all the time she'd spend away from home. "He'd ask 'Why are you working so hard? Aren't there people who can help you?'"

As a result of Eddie's ill health she's been forced to step back from work a bit over the past year. And she's discovered joy in little things like planting a herb garden, going for walks and feeding the birds in their garden – just like her husband used to do.

A keen golfer, Patricia is itching to get back on the greens.

In the past when quizzed about retirement plans she'd just laugh it off but now having recently turned 70, she admits she's taken the first step and bought a book about retirement planning.

But you can hear her heart isn't really in it. With Eddie gone, the thought of