

Cottbus
May 14th 1990

Dear Hilda and Rusty,

Now we hope to be sure that you are back in Britain. When we said "Good bye" each other in Mazirubi nobody could imagine that we had to leave Africa earlier than you. In fact, at the end of January we got an information through our embassy to finish our work in Mazirubi and to come home as the last family of the GDR teachers group at SOMAFCO. The reason for it: lack of foreign currency to pay our stay by the GDR government. This measure was taken for the time being, not for ever, we were told.

We need not tell you our feelings when we came with such bad news to our SOMAFCO comrades. But despite all the disappointment and sadness we felt assistance, friendship and personal contacts of the students and teachers. Our new house-friends Thembi, Faddi and Ndakozo had have a good share in that. We were busy, not more in teaching but in packing the luggage for two of the other families because they could not come back from their holidays in the GDR as well as for us. But there was no day without some students or teachers visiting us to talk to us, to discuss the zig-zag-development in history, to encourage us or simply to ask Wolfhard for an advice in Chemistry. And we listened to the delightful songs when the students celebrated for a whole day Nelson Mandela's release. What a distinction -

we had to finish so suddenly our solidarity work while Nelson was liberated after 27 years imprisonment - a matter to which our solidarity was directed over years.

Meanwhile we are at home, still in our GDR. The 26 February was the day of our arrival and we came just right to the elections. We think you could get the results of the votings for the parliament and the communal organs from the newspapers. Hilda, I can remember one of our talks and I think you were quite right when you mentioned: The people's consciousness on the way to socialism is developing much more slowly than we thought until now. I am really surprised how many people in our country voted for the „black alliance“, how many people want to live under capitalism („market oriented“) conditions only to have the advantage of the hard D-Mark and the chance to travel around the world. We are frightened by the increase of nationalism, anti-communism, also forms of racism and the decline of solidarity among the citizens of our country.

On the other hand, there are people who are very unhappy about our present situation which they regard as a step backwards, among them not a few youngsters.

However in the moment the young West, especially the FRG, is using our people's disappointment with the failures of the SED policy during the last decades to swallow as soon as possible the „little, weak and poor“ GDR.

It is unusual for the members of the FDS
(the former SED, now under reconstruction)
to be in opposition, to be not wanted as
ally by other parties and movements.

But it is again an old mistake often made
in history that the left forces split up
instead to go together. We have to learn
a lot and it will cost a long breath,
strength and the power to keep up for
building the new society.

Dear Hilda and Rusty, will you despite
all this come to visit our country?

We remember that you took such a
visit into consideration. We would be
glad to see you and to talk to both
of you. But may be you will be
sooner than we can think back in
South Africa.

First of all we hope you are healthy
and we send you our best regards.

With love from
Sabine and Wolfhard

Old House Farm
Dorstone
Herefordshire HR3 6BL

Dear Sabine and Wolfhard,

Were happy to hear from you, although, of course, not happy that you had to leave Mazimbu. 'For the time being' . . . but I think that we all find it hard to foresee a time when the new Germany will return to the generous giving of aid to African countries. They are throwing out the good with the bad. I can imagine what an upheaval it was for you, and the problems of packing for the other families. All I can say is that although it was brought so abruptly to an end, you must both have enriched your lives with your African experiences, and be grateful that you had the opportunity to live and work in African countries.

After we left Mazimbu we spent some time in Lusaka - which is really a town to avoid if possible. It is not a particularly attractive town, and for security reasons the ANC offices are scattered in distant suburbs; no transport; phones that mostly don't work. However, we had the joy of meeting Walter Sisulu and the others there - I enclose a copy of an article that I wrote for a British newspaper, the Guardian. I also interviewed a number of people for my proposed book.

Then we went on to Harare in Zimbabwe. It is a beautiful town, with wide avenues lined with flowering trees - I have never seen such massive and beautiful trees all over the town and the suburbs. Basically it seems very little changed from colonial times. A few Africans seeping up into the middle classes, and a sprinkling buying houses in the spacious white-dominated suburbs. But both in Zambia and Zimbabwe we found the ordinary people extremely relaxed and friendly, very pleasant in casual contacts in hotels, the shops and streets, and so on. In Harare we enjoyed generous hospitality from former Johannesburg friends, and we became tourists and holiday-makers for a time. We had visited Victoria Falls on our way through from Zambia, spent a few days there; it is one of the world's wonders, and I hope you can go there one day. It is an overwhelming sight and sound, the countryside all around is totally unspoilt and undeveloped. We also visited the ruins at Great Zimbabwe, stone walls and structures put up by Shona tribespeople hundreds of years ago. The South African and Rhodesian history books used to say they were built by Arab traders from the north, or something like that, because they would never admit that Africans were capable of such constructions, that were evidence of a developed civilisation..

In Harare, also, we met Nelson, as you will see in the article, and spent a couple of hours with him. It was a most joyful and exciting time.

Then the problems of returning to a house and garden neglected for a year, and needing so much to put it right, while the pressure is on me to get on with my book, and I keep making tiring and expensive trips to London to interview people there. The whole South African community in exile has been quite disorientated by the pace of events, and the possibility of everyone returning home. When are you going back? we are constantly asked. Well, in our case we would need an amnesty before being able to return, as we both have charges against us. But in any case, we are not thinking of going back to live, although it would be wonderful to visit. There are too many other considerations after 25 years away - homes, jobs, work, families, as many of the exiles are beginning to realise.

It seemed to me that in the year we were away from England, the world turned upside down. And with it, some unpleasant realisations of what

lay underneath the surface. How could we ever have imagined the chauvanism, the xenophobia, the racialism, that was still so rampant - or waiting to be revived - among the people of the socialist countries? It has been a process of watching the deepest faults of the Western world emerge: the age of 'me-ism' that dominates American life, and has been the feature of the Thatcher regime all these years, of personal greed, the desire to grab the glittering goodies of capitalist society. Yes, I know there are still good people everywhere with idealism and a sense of personal sacrifice, but for the time being they are swamped under this wave of 'market-orientated' expectations - the belief that they will, each and every one, move up into the sphere of high-income living, smart cars, clothes, expensive homes and travel . . . Some of them will, but most of them will find living in a market-orientated society is as tough as anywhere, without the cushioning of advantages of education and other amenities that came with socialism.

I am thinking of a visit to Germany - to the Germanies - to interview South Africans for my book, but if I do come it will be without Rusty. And I haven't yet settled on a date, although I have asked our ANC representative in Berlin to arrange a visa. The next few months are going to be packed. In July, for two weeks, we are having a bog South African cultural event - 'Zabalazi' - which will be attended by cultural workers from South Africa, and those in exile; symposia, exhibitions, films, debates, theatre - all sorts of things - and I AM involved with some of the events. At the same time I am really needing to concentrate on the book - I have a contract to fulfil, and time rushes by, so I am trying to arrange all sorts of trips to Europe, France, the Scandinavian countries, and so on. While I sit inside and work, the beautiful countryside outside keeps demanding that I come out. We arrived back in England at the most wonderful time of the year, a precious and early Spring, with an outpouring of blossom and young green. The country where we live was spectacularly beautiful. After this book I am going to give up writing, speaking, everything, and just sit and paint pretty pictures and enjoy being alive.

Dear Sabine, we will not forget the pleasures of our friendship in Mazimbu, the journey up the mountain; your generosity with materials for painting - and for eating! We will meet again, and hope that your lives will bring other satisfactions, through work, through the reformation of your communities and society.

Keep well! With love from both of us

August 16th 90

Dear Sabine,

I will be in Berlin on September 9th, having been invited to attend an anti-fascist rally that is taking place there.

I was in Berlin about a month ago, but did not have time to contemplate a visit to Cottbus, and unfortunately I did not have your phone number.

The man who is arranging my visit is Perry Friedman, his phone 589-4431, if you want any further information.

Hope you and Wolfhard are both well, despite the depressing situation that now exists.

With love

Hille

Comans, 9.1.91

Dear Hilda, dear Rusty,
Thank you very much for sending
such a nice letter to us. Really,
there are still good people in the
world. I showed the linocut to
my students and they admired
immediately the three mothers
with their children.

As for me, I could manage a
new years card only at the last
day of 1990. And I had no
better idea than to refer to a
sentence written by the GDR
author Dieto Noll some years
ago in the novel "Kippenberg".
In my opinion, it is a helpful
thought to overcome difficult
situations. I try to translate
it for you into English and
hope you will understand the
sense:

"But one of the difficulties of life we have to cope with consists just in that also with a soul which became scarred not to indurate but to remain sensitive, sympathetic and inclinable to man."

The red label I put under the text because our life is now full of such labels. They stick on each commodity to mark the price of it, mostly in that way:

£11.99

Nevertheless - life is going on and we have to cope with it. The problems of our Bulgarian friends are more complicated than ours.

We can still work as teachers, but we don't know how long.

Wolfherd is teaching adults in evening classes. I work as a teacher for Art, English and History in a secondary school, teaching from 6 to 9. My subject in

History / Form 6 is fortunately
the slavery and feudalism.

Today I spoke with my students
about the emergency of the Arabian
Caliphate during the 8th century.

At the beginning of our lesson we had
a short talk about the present
situation in the Arabian region.

Our students know something about
it but I recognized that only
few of them can grasp the danger
for world peace linked with the
situation there in these days.

I myself was shocked when only
2 days ago the news speaker announced
in the radio: "Mr. Baker said,
if Saddam Hussein does not leave
Kuwait until January 15th

there will be war." Without any
sense or feeling of responsibility!

Let me finish here and wish you
all the best, especially peace
and health for the year 1991.

With love

Sabine and Wolfhard.

**ABER EINE DER
SCHWIERIGKEITEN
DES LEBENS, DIE ES
ZU MEISTERN GILT,
BESTEHT EBEN DARIN,
AUCH MIT EINER
NARBIG GEWORDENEN
SEELE
NICHT ABZUSTUMPFEN,
SONDERN EMPFINDSAM,
EINFUEHLSAM
UND DEM MENSCHEN
ZUGENEIGT
ZU BLEIBEN. DIETER
NOLL**

07. 95

P
F 19.91

April 2nd. 91

QUATTROVENTI

MONTEFILI

GREVE IN CHIANTI (FI)

Dearset Hilda and Rusty,

The winter here seems to be over and as always, the year, a short while back so newly begun, is speeding into its fourth month. So before saying another word about anything else, we want to know when you will be coming to us. You can choose the time since we have no arrangements fixed with any prospective guests.

We are both well and the countryside is awash with blossom and green fields make a splendid background to all the gentle colours. The daffodils have come and gone but the hyacinths and wallflowers with patches of arabis and aubretia make up for their loss. Soon the first tulips will burst and the lilac is so nearly out that it can only be days before the air is fragrant around them.

With you perhaps the lane is still full of daffodils? So having enjoyed this English spring you may not feel too reluctant to come to Italy soon. We hope you are both well and that you did not have too hard a winter. I am not going to ask any questions now because we can do all that when we meet. One thing I must tell is that we saw the Ruth First film made by her daughter. Very moving and we thought extremely sensitively made. What a ~~de~~perately sad childhood. Much more of this when you are with us.

We hope all your young ones are flourishing. Ours have moved to Liverpool. Maybe we told you this before. They are settling in still and havent as yet sold their house in Newcastle., property market being what it is at present.

We look forward enormously to hearing from you soon and we both send our warm good wishes and our love,

Tella.

Cottbus, 1. November 1992

Dear Hilda and Rusty,
after I took part in a seminar for English teachers I'm in a better mood to write letters than before. Many things in our country are getting worse - we expect, you could get something about it by reading the newspapers or watching TV. Aggression and racism are still increasing. Firstly you find this in the real actions or better: the missing acting of the leading politicians, then in the pictures and words of our German mass media, in the behaviour of the people belonging to different parts of the society and finally - most obviously - in such inhuman actions against foreigners or people "who look like southern types" in several parts of Germany. It's not only a German problem but having in mind our own history I must say I'm ashamed that such a large part of Germans didn't learn from our history and follow ideas of an inhuman racism.

At school many students don't like learning. They don't know what to become later because there are less perspectives to get a good job in Eastern Germany. Some parents try to earn money for their families in the "old parts" of the FRG. But many of the former GDR's citizens are frustrated in connection with the increasing unemployment, the rising rents and the decreasing financial means for the social sector, especially the educational system.

I-Sabine - work in a comprehensive school (GESAMTSCHULE) in the second year. I try to find step by step a close contact to my students and to the teachers. That's sometimes not easy because everybody has got lots of his/her own problems.

But we found out that talking to each other is good for a better understanding of the present problems of people. That's not a new idea but nowadays it seems to be forgotten.

After years of "education for all" in the GDR we are faced more and more with differences between groups of people within the social and also the educational system. The best students leave after grade 6 to grammar school. Another part of the students is almost incomprehensive because they are faced with the unemployment of their well trained parents or relatives. Others understand the "new freedom" as anarchy and try to second such groups which instigate violence against foreigners and also handicaps.

But how are you doing and feeling? Are you still living in the "Old Forum"? We often remember with happiness our stay with you, your nice garden, your books, Hilda's drawings and the talks we had with both of you. Recently we saw a TV film about the history of South Africa. It started with the colonization and led up to the today's situation. Even if it wasn't made from a progressive point of view it showed the leading role of the ANC in the struggle against apartheid. It gave a lot of information about Nelson Mandela and mentioned Walter Simela as well as Bishop D. Tutu and many others. Within this film it was also reported about the double game of the government: negotiations with the ANC on the one hand and aggravating discord between the ANC and the INKATHA party on the other one. Either it was told that achieving political rights for black and coloured people doesn't mean that the living conditions will be improved automatically. Well, so far. But some clear side-swipes against the S.A. Communist Party were not missing.

Dear Hilda, dear Rusty, we send you some of the photos we took during our trip through England and Wales. It was really a nice Abbey we visited that foggy day when you showed us round the black mountains. One photo was taken in the Centre for Alternative Technology near Machynlleth. Rusty suggested to go there and it was really interesting. We found a camping site nearby and went two days later to Snowdonia. There we put up our tent during a bright afternoon, neatly alone on a large pasture. From there we surrounded Snowdonia by car and visited Caernarfon Castle on a rainy day. The next day we climbed the well-known mountain Snowdon, starting in sunshine. But when we reached the top there was only fog, storm, rain, so we were not able to see the mountain. But after all it was great and we enjoyed this now very much. Our last days in Wales we spend in Manorbier Castle near Tenby. We swam in the stormy sea and walked few kilometres along the impressive Pembrokeshire Coast (National) Park. When we came home from our holiday tour we recognised that we had had a very good weather in Wales - one day rain or fog, the next day sunshine. In Cotteswold county people suffered from the unchanged dry and hot weather. Without any rain during July and August there were no green meadows, hedges and trees like we had seen in Wales. Many trees and other plants were dried or burnt by the sun, even a good deal of the crops. But that season is over.

Autumn has come and we enjoy the colours of the yellow, red or brown leaves. We like spending our weekends walking through the

nearby Spreewald are our nice Branitzter Park.
We hope that the moist and cool days of this
autumn won't be too unpleasant for your
life at "Old House Farm". Or could you already
manage to move to Oxford or to an other
place? If you should have a new address,
please, let us know it.

With love
Yours Sabine and Wolfgang.

25 January 1993

Dear Sabine and Wolfhard,

That was a fine, long letter, Sabine, and thank you very much for the photos you sent, which gave us a picture of your trip - the coast looked beautiful. We also visited the Centre for Alternative Technology, one day in pouring rain. And in the summer went to Pembrokeshire for a visit to our daughter Frances who was holidaying there with family and friends; grey skies, black rocks, grey sands - oh, so very different from South Africa! But the small children enjoyed it, not knowing anything better.

As you see, we have moved. We moved in November, the son of a friend of ours bought our house and after many visits to Oxford we found a place that we thought we were prepared to live in. It is about 5 miles from Oxford, a truly conventional little semi-detached box on a housing estate. The house is not very attractive - small rooms, etc, but at the back it has a lovely garden that opens out onto the Oxford canal, which is now flows past at the foot of our garden, and barges coast along it, ducks, two wonderful white swans, and the garden has trees with many birds. The best bedroom upstairs is my studio, it looks out onto the garden, so I can sit and watch the birds and the canal while pretending to do something.

Although I miss our lovely old house and the wonderful scenery around there, I am pleased that we have moved. First, it is warmer here, although we are only now putting central heating into the house; then we are closer to all our children, and close to London - it takes an hour or a little more by road or rail - and so more in touch with what is going on. Oxford is a most beautiful city - it is a Jekyll and Hyde city (if you know R L Stevenson). The centre is marvellous and a delight; but it has its dark side - Oxford was a major industrial city, centre of car-making - so street after street of deadly mean little houses; a divided city: the favoured students in their elegant colleges and the workers in their monotonous, ugly streets - and now with such high unemployment. Still, I do enjoy the elegant city with its museums, cinemas, exhibitions.

Since we moved I've been totally unproductive. Rusty is busy at a familiar-occupation - that is, tearing this house to pieces to put it together more to our mutual liking. We had money from our old house - this one cost less - for us to be able to afford to make some alterations, knocking down walls to open up rooms, installing a new kitchen and so on. As he undertakes to do most of the work himself, it means a state of chaos for months on end, as he has to re-wire, put plugs in all the rooms, do over all the electrics, take out all the old kitchen, etc. It's work I can't help with, so I attend to the domestic side - shopping and cooking under difficulties and read the papers and watch the birds. So next time you come to Britain, you will be able to stay with us here and see Oxford. How about it?

We have seen quite a number of films on TV about the rise of neo-Nazis and fascism, not only in Germany but here too, although not quite so extensive. There are a number of cases of murders of Asians - they are very much resented in the towns with high unemployment, as you can well understand, they are the most hardworking people, but do not integrate well (the Carribeans are not so unpopular, they mingle better). We also saw what has happened in Cottbus. Maybe if we could discuss it, it would be easier, but I find the word situation very difficult to face these days, with the terrible senseless killing, the suffering in every country that you look at. What has happened in Angola is terrible - the UN just let Savimbi start the whole thing up again. Somalia, Sudan, India and its secular killings - well, all over. Still, we were pleased at the election of Clinton; with all the limitations of such a man and the huge interests that empower him, he does represent something better than the old regime, and even such comparatively small things as

lifting restrictions on abortion information and doing something about the bans on homosexuals in the forces are quite big steps forward. If only he would stop the crazy bombing of Iraq! America showing its might to the world. But what will they do with their huge weapons, the Pentagon, those planes, ships and all the rest if they haven't anyone to use them against?

I can understand how difficult teaching must have become for you, and I suppose that you have to remind yourselves that you do at least have jobs. It is really sad to see the young people of this country, so many of whom leave school and have no prospects of work whatsoever. And to see what is happening in Russia today with that Yeltsin and his crowd - all the 'entrepreneurs' getting rich, and the people getting nothing. Well, it's not a pretty picture, and the only way to get pleasure out of life is to concentrate on some small things, like camping on mount Snowdon, or visiting friends.

My publisher keeps delaying publication of my book, while reassuring me how wonderful it is, and this also depresses me. It's been ready now for many months, but there is always some reason or other to postpone publication. The publishers here have become big monopolies, and my contract was originally signed with one publisher, then taken over by another. I just have to be patient, and hope that when it does come out they'll want to send me to South Africa to launch it - that would be good.

We both keep well, in spite of deficiencies of age - they increase. Make the most of your years, they speed away so quickly.

With love from us both to both of you

Collection Number: A3299

Collection Name: Hilda and Rusty BERNSTEIN Papers, 1931-2006

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers Research Archive**

Collection Funder: **Bernstein family**

Location: **Johannesburg**

©2015

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of the *Hilda and Rusty Bernstein Papers*, held at the Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.