

15 February 96

Hilda Bernstein
57 Lock Crescent
Kidlington
Oxon OX5 1HF
Phone 01865 37 3642

Dearest Janet

You know how sometimes there's an accumulation of small things cluttering up your life? That's me, at the moment, so what better time to forget them all, or rather let them slide and write letters instead. Things like accounts that are not right and have to be disputed before being settled, like the lavatory cistern suddenly blowing something & shooting water all over me and the floor; drains being blocked and a ghastly smell for days and days that couldnt be located; people enquiring about things, sending amateur manuscripts and wanting your honest opinion; tights with holes in the toes that could be mended and used . . . well, do I have to go on?

However - bulbs are begining to nose their way up in our garden, we've even seen the sun on and off for some days, it's lighter in the mornings when I get up, we went to a wonderful concert, and next week - South Africa!

The drawings of your mother: they are, of course, drawings of old age. I should have appreciated that when I sent them off - so daunting not only for you, but for me as well. Perhaps the personality of your mother is not really there, just an old woman who lived out her last years in discomfort and pain. I don't know if daughters necessarily get more like their mothers as they get older - I find myself getting more like my daughter (Toni). The sharpness, almost rudeness about things which she always shows - I hear myself saying something and think 'But that's Toni's voice.' I dont know what that signifies! Maybe I've been suppressing this side of my nature all these years and now its coming out.

+ He says, of course, the inspiration for the letter!

I'm looking forward to Studs' book. If you don't send your redundant copy I'll even think of buying one. We are gradually getting buried underneath books. Xmas gifts, marked down bargains, paperbacks I've always wanted - all shelves are full and books pile above them. Many unread. Yet of all things I'm re-reading instead, old favourites, including Jane Austen because of the great flow of cinema versions (dont know about the USA but she's the flavour of the month here) and I want to get back to the real Jane, the witty, humourous writer. I'm re-reading Eugenia Ginsberg's two extraordinary, marvellous books on her years in the Gulag: Into the Whirlwind and Within the Whirlwind. They might have been published under different names in the USA. If you've never read them, and cant get them from a library or something let me know, I will see if I can get them here. They are so full of warmth, humanity, wisdom and love under the most extreme and terrible circumstances, and compelling to read as a thriller.

My own writing has come to a stop, as I need to do research, and this entails getting to the right library or sources. I'm joining the Bodlein, but have been told that because of poor listings, etc, it is difficult to find what you want there unless you have names of books, which I havent. So its on hold until we return at the end of March. Incidentally, I have been so frustrated over the women's organisations here - virtually there is no woman's movement any more as far as I can make out in any organised form. I have now contacted three different feminist orientated organisations, drawing blanks; or what is more irritating, always being promised to 'phone me back' or write @ and then they don't. Not much use to you, I'm afraid, but still trying, although this coming week will be rather frantic.

On the feminist subject. I dont know if you read much news from here, but recently it seems the 'backlash' as they call it has been in flood. Apart ~~for~~ from there not being a strong feminist movement any more, all we get are publicity tours for

Reading their books

American women writers such as Naomi Woolf who I think are pretty crappy, or whose work doesn't really apply so much to British circumstances. The Labour Party, in a moment of aberration, decided to impose women only shortlists for their election candidates (in case you don't know how ~~it~~ it works - local Labour Party branches select their proposed Parliamentary candidates, who then stand in the next election) To increase the number of women in parliament they chose a number of what were deemed to be 'safe' seats, and told the local branch that they must choose from a women' only short list. This had already been done in several constituencies when two wormy ^{men}merds (labour, wanting the seats) took the case to the Equal Opportunities Board, which ruled that a woman-only list was discriminatory against men and therefore illegal. So the LP has had to drop the whole idea. What was most sickening were the articles - all explaining why this was a crazy idea, women must succeed on their own merit and not be especially selected, etc, etc, you must be familiar with this sort of crap, if ~~not~~ I'll have to enlighten you about how people think over here. This started me thinking about South Africa. The ANC insisted on a certain number of their candidates being women, and most of these were put at the head of the lists, which practically ensured their election. The result is that the House of Assembly now has nearly a third of its members women ⁺ among the highest of any parliament. And an MP, who was also a member of the old, all-white parliament (a man) has said that it already has had a remarkable effect on the way the whole thing works; not so much in the parliamentary sessions, where the women are still more silent, less ready to speak on aspects of policy than the men, but very much so in the committees where the work is actually done. He says the women brush past the rhetoric, and get down to details of how you are going to make this or that policy work. So I decided to write an article for the British press about this subject of what they call political correctness (with a sneer), PC, or what the SA's call affirmative action . . . but after a week I'm still waiting for the Embassy to supply me with statistics that I need.

I have written to Mary. And the recipe for shortbread would do well this side of the ocean as well.

I wish your computer is well and operating again - couldn't you get them to lend you one while it was out of order? The only things I write by hand are letters of condolence, and notes scribbled on bits of paper that litter drawers and desks. Oh well! Keep your sights on your overseas trip - we must meet again before one of us gets too old to move.

Much love

Hilda

* and this has had an effect on the other parties - de Klerk's Nationalists, for instance, are now appointing women to their previously men only committees, etc, & putting up more women candidates.

29 March 1996

Hilda Bernstein
57 Lock Crescent
Kidlington
Oxon OX5 1HF
Phone 01865 37 3642

Dearest Janet

Your letter was excellently timed - 24 hours to recover from a sleepless overnight flight before it arrived on my doormat. In a way the news was not unexpected. When I saw Mary in hospital in September 94 I was shocked by the deterioration in her appearance - not having seen her for a long time. And then when the months went by it was clear she was not making any kind of recovery; although, of course, I did not know the extent of the damage to her whole body. It is so difficult from a distance like this . . . do you have a fax? We don't, but I will give you Keith's and Toni's fax numbers, so that if you want to send me information quickly you can do so.

I don't know what to write to you. Just recently, before we went to SA, a close friend, Harold Wolpe - one who escaped from jail in 1963 - was in exile all those years with us, went back to SA 2 years ago, had an important university research project on education, died suddenly (heart); I phoned his wife, Annemarie, and said 'I don't know what to say.' She sounded more controlled than I was. She is remaining on in SA, one of her daughters has decided to go there too. But the family was all split up by the return, as so many families have been.

I wrote to Mary yesterday, not knowing whether she is still alive, able to listen to letters read to her, or what. You want to be close to a dying friend, and I feel nothing but this sad remoteness.

What will happen to Ben? Presumably there is enough money for him to live in a proper protected home. Here in England they range from reasonable to ghastly, with most, it seems, near the bottom end. But with enough money you can be protected against the worst. It's 35 years since we met in Delhi and my enduring picture of Mary will be of that handsome, black-haired, seemingly powerful and self-confident woman with whom we shared a unique (†) experience.

WE had a most wonderful time in SA. We escaped from the nastiest winter we could remember (short memories, of course), dull, grey, dark, depressing, sordid, to the end-of-summer SA, brilliant light, sharp shadows, primary colours, close friends, and the luxury and comfort that has not yet attacked the white standard of living. In Jhbg stayed in the house of a daughter of friends (now dead) - large, rambling Jbg home with glorious garden, essential swimming pool, domestics who come and remake your bed properly to their liking after your slapdash effort, meals brought on trays on sunlit open areas, and cars lent (no public transport for whites in Jhbg - you must have a car.) We had lunch with a friend at the Foreign Ministry in Pretoria, a weekend in a game park with ~~my~~ our hosts (who own a private lodge on the edge of Kruger National Park). Saw masses of friends, ate too much, and spent one lovely sunny day filming with Nelson Mandela, Sisulu, and others. The film, being made for SA Broadcasting, - well, I have my doubts about what it will be like, but for ~~the~~ us it meant a day with a man who is now regarded as god by nearly all SA's and a free holiday into the bargain.

After the filming we went to Capetown, again stayed with friends (returned former exiles) again SA white luxury, a most gorgeous garden festooned with brilliant bouganvillea in several shades of orange and red, the obligatory swimming pool, enormous quantities of food - SA's eat meals the size of American meals, and so much wasted. Here we hired a car and gloried in the incredible beauty of the Cape, the mountains and the great curving surf beaches, the super abundance of flowers, plants, trees . . . well that was the tourist side.

I also went to parliament - we sat in the gallery spotting old friends, so many of whom are now MPs, or even more elevated, ministers. I also had an interview with Frene Ginwala, who is the Speaker, a formidable former academic (she's in my book) who has ~~also~~ played a major role in getting a very progressive gender policy adopted by the, basically chauvanistic ANC. The presence of so many women in parliament has transformed the place. Frene said: We demanded that a creche be opened before the session began. They asked us, for how many children? We said, we don't know. They said, what ages? We said, we don't know, but we must have a creche. They got it, and it is now available for the children of the staff who work at the House of Assembly (parliament) as well as for the MPs. The House is a massive, marble filled building in the heavy British top colonial style, and its corridors were adorned with paintings of old white males, presidents, prime ministers, etc. They have all been taken down, and the galleries are now filled with a modern art show, many depicting the liberation struggle, some good, most - well, so-so, a few ~~are~~ awful. but the whole comprising a ;ively and totally different aspect.

The women spoke of their difficulties, but a lot of these apply to male MPs as well - the majority, after all, almost all of them, have never held an official position, don't know about constitutions, rules, etc, so they have all had to learn how to find their way. The women confirmed what I had already heard - that few of them shine in parliamentary sessions, but they weild great influence and are very active on the committees, which is where the work is really done. Apart from old (agewise) friends who are now MPs, there is a wonderful input of young, energetic, bright women, all races, although the majority are African, who impressed me enormously.

The problems in SA are horrendous - 7 million still living in shantytowns, unemployment, a generation of uneducated, unemployed youth and horrendous crime - you live behind iron bars, iron gates, and with buttons to press not only to get in and out, but to summon immediate response from protective agencies. Some things are degenerating into a mess - the postal service, for instance - and there is corruption in every department, from top to bottom, built-in by 40 years of apartheid. Bringing together all the various separate 'embassies' and departments of the Bantustans, for instance (an example - under apartheid there were eight different education departments) and being unable to get rid of civil servants (part of the pact with de Klerk), wrestling with outright sabotage or with civil servants who are just unable to understand and conform to new ways . . . , well, it's endless. And yet we came away with a feeling of great optimism. Wonderful things are being done - here and there. Water taps installed in remote villages where women used to walk miles to carry cans of water on their heads. The black kids in what were once all-white schools, looking smart and beautiful in their uniforms, and mixing together. Changes in all sorts of things. The strangest

of all to us is the way the whites have changed - have (except for the lunatic fringe) accepted the total end of social apartheid, even to the extent of finding hard to understand why they subscribed to it for so long. It is as though the whole country is being turned around. Naturally, for middleclass whites whose only hardship so far has been the crime and car-jacking (of mammoth proportions, gangs operating across countries and continents) it has been easy to adjust. The mass of the people are still waiting for their homes and jobs. But there are so many visible signs of change and gradual improvement, and such radical, progressive laws being formulated for the new constitution, such good firm attitudes regarding gender, sexual attitudes, freedom of speech, and so on . . . well I can't really convey to you adequately why, when one sees the shanties and poverty, there is such a positive feeling.

Come on, fix up your travel jaunt. I'll come to London to meet you there and perhaps we can exchange better conversations than this way, by letter.

(We also went to see the penguins on a Cape beach where humans stand behind a little string demarking how far they can go and stare at the penguins, and the penguins stand on the other side staring at the humans. And to Kirstenbosch, a paradise of natural flowers and trees.)

I put on pounds and pounds.

Thanks for the recipe. I'm returning the cutting - had news of it - a woman playing god? What next!

Of course everyone kept asking: Why don't you come back? And how tempting it is. But - I'm 80 - nearly 81. Rusty is 76. One of us is due to die before the other. Here we have a family of support. It's hard to set up home once again so far away, and age is a major factor

6 May 1946

Janet - this is not a letter - a note to tell you I received the lovely looking Dorked boots - BUT - it is inscribed to you. Has there been a mix-up about which copy I was to receive? And shall I post it back to you? It does seem wrong to have it, and I'm sure you would want it.

Then comes the question of all the rest of this wasted space - when I'm not in a letter-writing mode and haven't anything to say in any case. (Young is here and with it a lifting of spirits, and time wasted in our garden - nature imposing its demands on us - but oh, so beautiful with masses of tulips and blossom everywhere.

I did write to Mary again. Any news about her condition?

Much love

Hilda

By air mail
Paravion

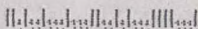


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Aerogramme

Janel Stevenson
783 5th Street
Hammond
OR 97121
U. S. A.



Name and address of sender

Hilda Bernstein
57 Lock Crescent
Kidlington
Oxon OX5 1HF
Phone 01865 37 3642

Postcode

An aerogramme should not contain any enclosure

To open slit here



To open slit here

Dearest Janet

1) I posted the drawings of your mother today. I'm afraid they have been lying around too long in drawers, getting stained and crumpled, but I think they are good drawings. I have a plan-chest draw full of such, of friends, of people at meetings, in trains, and a book of sketches called 'Boredom at Airports'. I think they are my best work, *but* nobody wants drawings, so they just get yellow and crumpled.

2) The delay in writing has been trying to follow the ~~XXX~~ Take back the Night story. Fawcett were no help, but they ~~put~~ put me on to London Guildhall University, who wrote 'I don't think any work has been done specifically on these. . . There was a wave of them in this country in the late 1970s and early 1980s, centred particularly on street violence against women, especially sexual violence, including pornography etc; in 1977 there were well-publicised torchlit marches through Soho, in Leeds, Manchester, Bristol and other major cities. According to a Spare Rib report (women's magazine, now defunct) the original idea came from Germany.' Not much help, the problem being that all these people take ages to answer. Discussed it with Frances, who put me on to the Pankhurst Centre in Manchester (didn't know of its existence), and I am now waiting for some response from them to my enquiry. I'm worried that by the time I do have something it will be too late for your needs.

3) Mary. Oh, what is there I can possibly say or do? I think of her getting more and more helpless, in ~~main~~, declining. She has been a good and generous friend - when Rusty & I went to La for Mark's wedding, she and Ben paid for a hotel for us because she was in hospital and couldn't put us up. I will write to her, but hardly know what to say. I'm beginning to feel that Rusty & I are two dinosaurs surviving from a past age; so many of our friends and associates are dead or ill. Harold Wolpe, who escaped from jail in 1964 has just died of a heart attack in Cape Town, to which he had returned and was doing a wonderful job in education.

I can echo what you wrote to me: 'The new hip is better than the old but not perfect ... And other things hurt. What hurts most is not having the money to do the travelling I'd like' This is exactly the way I feel, although my areas of travel differ from yours. Our money reserves are so low. Son Patrick is at last making a reasonable living after about six years of unrelenting toil & juggling with money, and he is making a monthly contribution to our living expenses. Keith will always give us money if we need, and has been very generous, but neither of us really want to rely on our kids. However, this very morning I had a phone call from a friend of ours who makes documentary films in SA, and she is doing something on Nelson, and wants Rusty and me to come over, will pay our fares, to take part. So we're going at the end of February to Jhbg, won't stay long, but what a welcome lovely break in the worst season of all in England - cold, damp, dark, perpetually overcast, grey, dismal and depressing.

I stopped painting while on a new writing project (although I swore I would never write anything again) It's about my sister Olga, who died a couple of years ago. Don't know whether it will be publishable, but a strange thing happens - when I start writing I can't draw or paint. My head is full of something else.

We went to Leeds last week because The Leeds Peoples' Choir was giving a concert to raise money for two projects - one a local Aids outfit and the other Medecin Sans Frontiers. The choir is Frances' joy and delight - she helped found it, taught them S African songs, arranges songs for them, etc. It was a splendid evening. The choir has grown and improved enormously - mainly women, half a dozen men (but they're not very good). They sing folk songs, 'ethnic' songs, all sorts of things. The latest song - new to them - is 'Buddy Can't you Spare a Dime!' The audience loved it! Frances' marriage is not very satisfactory (to put it mildly) but she has two beautiful sons, the youngest only 7, so tries to carry on in a situation for which there is no really right solution. She has a responsible job (her husband doesn't earn - he's a city councillor and house-husband) and makes a very active life of her own, plus the family.

Regarding your remarks about biographies - don't know if I mentioned that Rusty is writing his memoirs; but they are not really biography, they are ~~political~~ political memoirs, centred on his political life. He's at it day after day, relentlessly; just as well, what else could he do at this time of the year? His object is really to set the record straight about the Communist Party, the ANC, and all that bloody hell! *Apparently* *Wilson has given in & I can't get them - wrote to Oliver's & they haven't replied* happened 'behind the scenes' in those eventful years.

We went to Joni for Christmas - they used to come to me, now I go to them, a more satisfactory arrangement.

Much love
Hilda

To open slit here

To open slit here



An aerogramme should not contain any enclosure

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Hilda Bernstein
57 Lock Crescent
Kidlington
Oxon OX5 1HF
Phone 01865 37 3642

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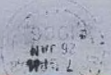
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15 August 1996

Hilda Bernstein
57 Lock Crescent
Kidlington
Oxon OX5 1HF
Phone 01865 37 3642

Dearest Janet

As always - your letter arrived just as I was going to write to you; wondering about Mary, whether to send her a note again, picturing a much more dire situation than you convey. So I am grateful to you and relieved - even if it doesn't turn out so well, you at least convey the feeling that she is alert and trying. Which is the best that can happen.

Your mention of 'Jump' sent me back to the book which I read some time ago. I have enormous respect for Nadine Gordimer, both as a writer and as a person. I am also not generally over fond of short stories. But I am convinced that she is a better short-story writer than a novelist. I'm at present half way through her latest novel (Non to Accompany Me) and find it hard going. She indulges herself too much in the novels - the convoluted sentences. I really loved most of the pieces in JUMP, and particularly the title story, which I think is a little work of genius. It could have been a novel - the old parents from Portugal (the setting is obviously Angola/Mozambique) - their new life, the way whites lived in those countries - she gets that atmosphere perfectly in her books - the patriotic young man, the horrible things, the disgust; and finally the uselessness of him now to anyone. That hotel. She conveys the whole thing in a few pages. As for the other bits, obviously some I liked better than others. But she always catches, exactly, the way people speak, the little gestures. Her portraits of Southern African life are true, and reflect the reality. There are a lot of novels and other things coming out in SA now. If you can get hold of The Scent of Apples by Mark Behr, it is a novel of childhood in SA - excellent (in paperback here - can send a copy if you wish).

Nadine is a small, quiet, unassuming person who listens all the time to people, notes everything in her computer-mind; and who has developed and changed as things in SA changed. She is not popular among SA readers, (the book-buying public being, at least up to recently, almost wholly white) - its those outside SA who like her best. I think this is because in all her books her portrayals of black/white relationships cut too close to the bone - make whites uncomfortable. But what did you think of Jump?

Yes, our political scene is just as disheartening as yours - incidentally we are getting very full coverage of politics in the USA (at the moment the San Diego conference) in the press, on TV and radio. But what is so depressing here is not so much Major - who expects anything from him - but the Labour Party. Way ahead in the polls, more popular than they have ever been, and is it because they are deserting every principle they ever had or just keep quiet on controversial issues? On every issue that comes up - health, crime, a strike, the privatisation of the railways - they either refuse to make a comment one way or the other or try to outdo the Tories in reactionary attitudes. It's pathetic. And I will still vote for the bastards when the time comes.

Pleased to hear about your pb on Departure. Jonathan Cape broke their contract with me by refusing to publish a pb of The Rift - & legal advice was I would need 1,000s to contest them. So we came to an agreement whereby I got back all the rights (a lot of good that is) and some extra copies which I sell to friends at a reduced price.

Rusty is obsessively working to finish his memoirs, so I have had to put my own book-project on hold. Meanwhile I'm trying to research the background to it, finding it quite difficult to get what I want. Between that, the daily work of living, trying to do some painting (a picture in oils) and a much lower energy level than in the past, I'm fully occupied.

We had a wonderful couple of days in London when Nelson Mandela was here. His visit was quite extraordinary; nobody can remember any parallel with any other visiting dignitary (except pop stars, of course). The crowds everywhere were wild with adulation and love. When he spoke from the balcony of SA House to the massed thousands in Trafalgar Square he said all the right things: it was you, your protests outside this building, that helped me to stand on this balcony today - that sort of stuff. Tears ran down faces. We had the privilege of being in Westminster Hall when he addressed both Houses of Parliament - it was gorgeously beautiful, the fancy dress costumes of the guards, the trumpeteers, etc, the ceremony, - about the only thing the British do better than anyone else - the ritual and split-second timing. We loved it all. Then we had lunch at the Dorchester - the Queen was also present - and let me tell you the chef is absolutely tops. The next day, a reception in the SA High Commissioner's garden for old Anti- Apartheid and ANC supporters, where we had a chance to get closer to the man. Keith has embarked on an undertaking to make a pictorial record of the years of his presidency (which ends in 3 years time), a sort of fly-on-the-wall record, not formal pictures, and has been given special access to him. Somehow it's been a satisfactory round-up to our lives . . . we still get writers, academics, etc, coming to talk to us, the latest is Glenn Frankel of the Washington Post who spent two days asking us questions. He wants to write a book about us and 3 other white SA families; he says Americans know nothing at all about this.

Please tell me about the shoulder replacement (why, what they do). It's not just inquisitiveness - it's wanting to know about the availability of such spare parts and replacements for my deteriorating structure. I'm actually pretty well, and not old at all, only my legs and energy level seem to be 81.

If you speak to Mary again, please send my best love, and tell her any bits of this letter that might interest her. Haven't the time & energy to write another long letter.

I still have the photo of you and grand-daughter pasted up in my kitchen - she'll be much bigger by now. Oh yes, we are about to become grand-parents. Mark (Toni's ekdest son) and Heidi, are expeting a child in December. They live in LA. That's a kind of one-upmanship among our friends.

Much love

Hilda

great
(what a silly mistake!)

3 November 1996

Hilda Bernstein
57 Lock Crescent
Kidlington
Oxon OX5 1HF
Phone 01865 37 3642

Dearest Janet

Rusty has finished about two-thirds of his memoirs and after a painful process of editing (I was ruthless, but don't think he took notice of all my remarks) he has sent it off to Penguins in South Africa who, last March when we were there, we met and they expressed an interest in seeing them. So he's tidied up the dark corner where our computer stands and sent the keyboard off for repair, and - at last! - I can lay my hands on it and, I hope, wish, get on with my project. Which is:

I don't know if I ever told you about my sisters - two, I'm the youngest. The middle one, Olga, spent nearly 12 years in the Soviet Union, from 1935 to 1937. It was, in a sense, involuntary. She met an American engineer, Henry, who together with his sister Rae, a teacher, were going to the USSR in the early 30's for joint motives: first, the end years of the slump in the USA meant they had to wait to find jobs, second a mixture of idealism & response to the Soviet call for 'experts' to come and help build the new socialist society. Their idea was to work there for two-three years, then return home. Olga went to join Henry on that understanding.

My eldest sister and I were the political ones, passionately involved and at that time (or a little later) ardent Communists. Olga was the non-political one, in the sense that she was not really concerned about anyone but herself, but also that she disliked the USSR, didn't believe in the system, and never wanted to live there. When Henry and Rae, yielding to various pressures, decided to become Soviet citizens, Olga (who had retained her British nationality and her precious British passport) decided to leave Henry and return to England. This was about 1936. Then a series of events took place - too long for this letter, which delayed her departure - every time she was ready to go something else compelled her to stay longer; until in August 1939, packed and ready for the final time, about to leave, some friends persuaded her to come on holiday with them to the Caucasus before she left. September 1 - Hitler invaded Poland. Three days later England declared war on Germany. Olga was trapped in the USSR for the duration of the war and a while after.

She lived in Moscow, except for a fairly short period when Henry was evacuated to the Urals, and she spent a harsh winter in a near-Siberian village.

Years later, after she had re-married in England, had one daughter (my niece is a brilliant super-woman, a dynamo of multiple achievements, jetting around the world giving lectures on uro-gynaecology, of which she is the only Professor in this country) her husband died, Olga built up his small business into a successful enterprise, and among myriad activities, joined a writing class and wrote a number of short, episodic pieces about her Soviet experiences. I kept on nagging her to write more, I thought they were good and worth publishing but didn't yet comprise enough for a book. Two years ago she died suddenly.

What I want to do is to write about that particular episode in her life, incorporating the pieces that she wrote, as she wrote them; but filling in the background, because obviously people who read today have not lived, as we have, through those years. The way I think of it is that it is as though there were two plays going on at the same time on one stage. In the forefront the play about living in Moscow, shopping, working (she taught English at the Foreign Languages Institute), dancing, theatre - quite a pleasant and intellectual life, and holidays on the Volga, in the Caucasus. And in the background the second play, the sinister one, about those terrible years, specifically 35 to 37, of mass arrests, the show trials. And that gradually the voices of the actors in this play become louder, and merge with the everyday one, then overpower it.

My problem is this: I have masses of material about the USSR at war, about the arrests and trials - Robert Conquest, Alexander Werth, Harrison Salisbury, etc. But I have no material of what life was like particularly during the war years in Moscow. Olga's pieces are episodic and in a way very impersonal - she was

always very secretive about her personal life. What rations - did the trams run? airraids, how much heating for their flat, black-outs - I want the intimate, very personal atmosphere. I've scoured libraries. asked around; an American writer named Adam Hothschild to whom I wrote suggested some books which I haven't been able to lay hands on. I'm not asking you to go searching for these, but if just by chance . . . An American Engineer in Stalin's Russia, the memoirs of Zara Witkin; Moscow Yankee, by Myra Page; and Behind the Urals, an American worker in Russia's city of steel, by John Scott.

I have scraps of notes Olga left, a few memories of conversations, very little. Henry is a cipher who does not appear in her writings. After she left the USSR, she came out to South Africa and lived with us for a year. We didn't talk about her experiences. Why not? I think she began to try and tell us something of the nature of the society (my other sister was also with us at the time) but we were not ready to hear - did not want to hear. The USSR, our socialist goal, had emerged from that awful war, 40 million killed, nothing but heroism. But of course there were other factors. There was, in my case, my own underlying unease about certain things that I could not equate with my socialist idealism - the art, and architecture, for instance, and certainly the language of all their propaganda & publications (who said 'the corruption of language is the first sign of tyranny'?) And Olga recognised that we were not willing to listen to her, and didn't try.

Then she went back to England. We lived apart for another 20 years; and when we fled to England for the first many years we were so fully occupied with the mundane but real difficulties of middleaged people with dependent children trying to find and afford a place to live, get jobs, and in addition in my case travelling a great deal on Anti-Apartheid & ANC missions. So we saw each other occasionally, and later, when I read her writings, I always meant to ask her all those unanswered questions . . . always meant to. Too busy with other things, painting, writing, useless trivial meetings - remember? You told me I was daft to waste my time that way.

However, I think I can make a book out of what I'm still trying to research and the bits and pieces and her writings. So it's not about her life, only about that particular period in her life. We loved each other, but we were two very different types of people, and another thing was that after she left the USSR she wrote it all off, pulled down a gate or shut a door, so that what she wrote was always at one remove and impersonal.

Now I haven't time for other mundane news. Except yes, I did see Antonia's Line, and loved it. Yes, we've also had a surfiet of Clinton/Dole - our media choked with it. As soon as it is over the game will start with out own general elections in May next year. Can't wait - for it to be over.

Being a great-grandmother doesn't faze me, since they live in LA. I was always a lousy grandmother anyway.

And I'm pleased to hear that others enjoy my letters. My ego needs lots of pumping up in the few years left to us.

My love to Karen - Ethiopian women are all beautiful (at least, I thought so) and, of course, to you

Shirley

27 Dec 1996

Dearest Janet,

Yes, I like your title; but how am I going to be able to read it if it will only be read after you are dead? Given the longevity of your family it is highly likely I will be dead before you. Please consider seriously sending manuscript (part or whole) because I would so much like to see it.

Rusty has found a wonderful title for his memoirs: MEMORY AGAINST FORGETTING, which is from a Kundera quotation: The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. Good, eh? He is madly working on the last half/third, having had a very rave reaction to the first part from someone here whose opinion we value. And I'm madly waiting to get my hands on the word processor. Good of Karen to send 2 books, one of which gives me an excellent feel of certain times, and is a very good read in its own right.

I think visiting South Africa is a brilliant idea, one of the things that MUST be done before you die. Colin Sweet's widow (his second, not first wife) has a brother who runs Progressive Tours, and does a sort of political/sight-seeing tour of SA - several in fact, I was going to send you the brochure but decided the tours would probably be too expensive for you. Can't you scrape together enough to go?

This is the time of year that I wish more than anything to be in SA, think of last year, the warmth, space, light, brilliance of everything

Well, yes, I suppose I agree with your shouting. But everything today is the choice of the least worst option - Clinton/Dole, Blair/Major. The consolation about supporting and hoping for a Blair victory is that they have the largest list of women candidates ever, and if returned, they will make a qualitative impact on Parliament.

One reason I sent you The Rift is because I want you to be able to dip in any time to the women's stories, which are the best. One of the earliest interviews in the book is with Frene Ginwalla, who is now the Speaker in the SA Parliament. We will meet her again tomorrow night, as she is coming to Oxford to give the Olof Palme Memorial lecture. I very much hope you will be able to meet her when you visit the House of Assembly in Cape Town and have a chance to meet some of the wonderful young black women MPs.

Much love
Hilda

4 February 97

Dearest Janet

This is an 'interim' note just to let you know that I received your manuscript and immediately scanned through it.

It raised so many questions in my mind that I knew I must study it before writing to you about it. I was fascinated by the memoir on Sage which I think is a beautiful piece of writing. But what I need to write to you about is "Are you..." And that requires some dedicated time which I will devote to it soon. I just didn't want to receive your manuscript with blank silence (as my books have so often been received)

No word about Mary? Should I risk phoning her?

Tell Karen one of the books she lent me is extremely useful. I am soaked in stuff about the USSR in the war - most of which doesn't take my own writing any further but is interesting.

Much love

Hilda

By air mail
Par avion



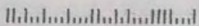
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Hilda Bernstein
57 Lock Crescent
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JANET STEVENSON

783 Fifth Avenue
Hammond, OR 97121

February 12, 1997

Dearest Hilda:

Don't take precious time now to worry the questions that chapter raises. Remember, this is not intended for publication. All I mean to do with it is leave it around for my kids and theirs to help them figure out what went on in the period when neither Phil nor I were ever "permitted" to be honest with them. Not that I wouldn't be fascinated--nay, avid--to hear what you think. So I'm not saying don't; I'm just saying don't put off other more pressing tasks.

I just talked to Mary. I think it would be wonderful if you would call her. She gets confused at times, but not over important things. June (her sister) says she is going slowly down hill --can't see well any more--and is of course absolutely bed bound. But she has interesting visitors--nieces and nephew and their children; also she "holds court" once a week with the accountant, the support people, and June.

I called to thank her for a Christmas present that always arrives in February and prepared myself with a political issue for her to "do something" about. It seemed to jolt her into an energy surge. She couldn't come up with a "what to do", but I had the feeling she'd have something healthier to think about than what ails her.

I've been calling on some of my contemporaries lately and fighting off depression at what age is doing to them. It doesn't seem to be doing the same to me --yet. Perhaps because I'm not reduced to the companionship of my own age group, or worse--and this is the case that threw me--shut up in a big,

virtually empty house with only one's spouse to talk to. Ben Margolis, the most brilliant mind of the team of lawyer that defended all the embattled reds--from CPUSA leadership to the screen writers, PTA mothers, and teachers--moved his ailing wife up here to be near their three sons. They live in a

1 March 97 - Crocuses out! Joy!

Dearest Janet

Inevitably as I read your 'Are You . . .' three or four times I was winking out parallels with my own experiences. Of course while there are similarities particularly when you write about motivation, the context in which we lived was really entirely different from yours. I find it hard to imagine how we would have survived the McCarthy era (of which I have read so much and seen on documentaries); because although we were also under severe attack from the State, to be a communist was just not such a terrible thing and did not have such opprobrium attached to it.

Two things puzzle me a little. The first: Your opening para; it seemed to me that you had inevitably to acknowledge the 'political dynamo that moved' you. I also felt the misgivings expressed on p.3 neither to confirm or deny had lost all validity. But why is there such reluctance, even today? And why the intention never to publish your opus while you are alive?

The second: The Soviet Union does not appear at all. So much of the angst and troubles I suffered in the SACP arose out of its stern attachment to the Soviet line and that there were things I could not accept. The SA Party to us was the supporter of all liberation struggles, and in the eyes of our leadership could never have the wrong 'line'. I was sharply reminded of this a few days ago when I read the obituary of a Russian writer, Sinyavsky. Not long after we arrived in England there was the case of two writers - Daniel and Sinyavsky - who were tried and sent to prison for writing articles attacking some aspect, I believe, of Soviet censorship. When I passionately defended their right, I was told by the group of the SA party (we operated in exile) that I wasn't a true communist. This wasn't the only occasion for a clash. I just wondered to what extent your work and your policies were - like ours - so deeply influenced by the Soviets.

My own differences increased, until in 1968, with the invasion of Czechoslovakia, I found myself completely isolated - the SACP in exile in Britain (and Africa) upheld the Russian invasion. I was told I was not permitted to resign (when I said I was resigning) but could be expelled. In the end it was more a case of drifting away, because in any case the little, mainly white, rump of the SACP that still met in a few groups in London were becoming totally ineffectual as the party gradually got itself together and was centred either in Tanzania or Zambia - the exiled leadership, that is, in its association with the ANC.

I was also constantly at odds with our party leadership even in the early days over the reports, articles, etc that came from the Soviet Union - particularly a (monthly, I think) news summary (in English) called Innprecor - Internatioanl Press Correspondence. Only years after did I read somewhere: Tyranny begins with the corruption of language. That now seems to me to fit absolutely. A stern letter was written to me by our party secretary saying that if I carried on in this way I was in danger of becoming a Trotskyite. I as deeply hurt. How absurd it all seems today.

Somewhat like your Hollywood group all whites in those days who associated themselves with the liberation struggle were members of the party. There were, of course, liberal whites who opposed apartheid, but they held themselves apart from the ANC. It was the 'political dynamic', with its wider objective than the simple achievement of one-man-one-vote (as we called it in those days) that impelled us. The result was that in two respects the party had a profound influence on the liberation movement. The first was in its larger outlook than a simple nationalism - its internationalism. The second was in respect of the ANC's adherence to a non-racial SA, even when under fierce attack by others, inside the country and all over Africa, for not being a 'pure' black movement.

In turn, the ANC brought about changes in the party, a less dogmatic attitude to nationalism, a deeper understanding of the immediate objectives. The continued high standing of the SACP in SA today stems from the role that white communists played in those days and after - Bram Fischer, Joe Slovo and others. It was different later on - in the 80s there was an upsurge among whites - students, academics and others - who became part of the black liberation struggle. But in the 40s and 50s, we were all CP.

I managed to subvert my problems by concentrating on the two issues that moved me most - peace and women. And I made compromises - rightly or wrongly in my personal relationship with Rusty, with whom I parted ways politically in 1968 and seriously considered leaving him - (children were the problem, and the economics of the separation) . He remained a 'hard-liner' right up to the Gorbachev days. And remains very much still a Communist (although not in any organisation) to this day.

Like you, I can say I was a member of the CP. But I am not now. I don't consider myself to be a communist, although the political influence remains, and, of course, a belief in a different and better way for society.

In this I feel at least we had what we believed to be an obtainable vision, and I feel sorry for our young people for whom the globalisation of the capitalist system, in its worst aspects, presents insuperable obstacles to change. And I must add that, despite all my fights, our people were made of the right stuff.

This seems to be more a letter about me than a comment on what you sent me. I just found it totally fascinating and it starts so many chains of thought. Also very well written. I wish there was more of it. But I do think it is important that it should be published - and not after you die (you could easily last another ten years.) It is history that the new generations do not know and ought to be told. Like Rusty's memoirs, the things that were hidden. Important not only for your sons; the children of all our contemporary families resent the secrets we kept from them - but because the history of each of us is a continuum; without knowledge those who have come later can't find logic and truth in formulating their own ideas.

This leaves me no time to comment on the 'brush with genius', which I found equally fascinating. That will have to wait to another time.

I did phone Mary, and she seemed bright and delighted.

You are right about a healthy diet of younger people. I have a friend - Blanche Katz, who lives in Cutchogue, NY. (Met her on a British Peace Committee cruise) She is approaching 90. She is continuously active in peace and women's organisations, writes letters to the press, and is as lively-minded as ever. WE also watch contemporaries getting mental sclerosis, and also too many getting things like cancer and other fatal things. We are two old people shut in our suburban house, but all our friends are younger than we are (the rest went back to SA).

Writing also helps. Keeps one's brain moving.

Our children keep constantly in touch. Toni phones and says: Just checking up on you. Or once: This is a guilt call. Why are you guilty? Because I haven't been in touch for a while. I said: And if I died you'd feel guilty. Yes, she said. (The others have a gentler approach.)

Much love

W. L. L.

I've made contact with one of Olga's former students, now old and blind, in Moscow, and want to try and go to interview him and others who knew her.

7 May 1997

Dearest Janet

Your letter (29 April) came this morning, together with a note from Mary. But first things first.

Hip replacement: Really sorry to hear about this one. Having never had major surgery before, I found it devastating, but always believed in my ability to make a swift recovery. Which I didn't. Blanche - I think I mentioned her to you - had one in her 80s and wrote that within six weeks she was gardening, driving, and looking after her Alzheimer-inflicted husband. I was sure that it would happen to me. It didn't. Had the op in February, 2 years ago. Reckoned in June I would be fit and able, so booked to go to Ethiopia. Was still then walking with a hospital stick, and although I trotted around markets and places for hours, it wasn't easy. I think maybe I damaged it then, because the going was often extremely rough. The trouble was that both the consultant - he who performs the op - and my physiotherapist kept assuring me that I was doing marvellously. When I complained about the slowness, they said well, sometimes people are pretty mobile at six weeks, sometimes six months. I asked 'Amd when do you get back to normal?' The consultant said 'Well, sometimes you never do.'

I don't think you should take my experience as typical, because now it is deteriorating, & in 2 weeks I have an appointment with the consultant to find out what it is about. I had got to going everywhere stickless, but found I was hobbling more and more which caused awful trouble in the other leg (bersitus I think they call it) Now I can walk for half an hour without difficulty - but with a stick. So I think the answer to your question about how soon you will be able to get around stickless is one that cannot be answered. It depends on how good your surgeon is, how much hacking and sawing he had to do in your case, and on you and your physical abilities or bone strength or whatever. But I would say anything from six weeks to six months would be normal. You just have to rely on your surgeon (carpenters with medical degrees, I call them) and get him to answer all your questions as frankly as he can.

Second point: How carefully I printed 'Janet Anderson' ! Havent written to her for months & months. Well, names of everyday things - quite apart from that - slip away from me more often as time goes by.

Mary: Here's the story from my end. After you told me it would be a good idea to phone her, I did, and had what I believed was a very good conversation, concluded in the normal fashion, with her saying she was going to phone me soon. But she didn't for a long time, I wrote a note or two, she sent a card and a note saying something about us being cut off, or the phone going dead (which it hadn't); ~~then xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx~~ two or three evenings ago she phoned, and again started off by saying had I dropped the phone, something happened - was the phone dropped last time - I really didn't know what it was about, so just went on having an ordinary conversation. I cannot think what is at the root of it - maybe a confusion with an incident with somebody else? I would have thought that close friends would know by now that I'm just not the kind of person to get huffy and slam down the phone, except on double-glazing saleswomen who always phone at supertime. However, we parted with loving assurances on both sides - and I said I would write, which I did, & she said she would phone again.

I'm highly pressurised at the moment. First, the hip, a nagging worry at the back of my mind (but at the front at night, for some reason bed is more painful than day time activities). Now I'm trying to arrange to get to Moscow to interview elderly ex-students of my sister, & the difficulties connected with arranging this seem to be enormous. Can't waste letter-space and time on this, but it's very expensive & full of uncertainties. This has to be done soon, as my contact says in June, July, August, everyone leaves Moscow for their dachas, so we (I need Rusty with me for very practical reasons) ~~cannot~~ *Continued* →

are trying desperately to get everything arranged (visas now take ages) booking a hotel, finding out how we will manage without an interpreter & without languages (my contact is English-speaking, but housebound) and so on. At the same time I had arranged months ago to exhibit jointly with three other artists in the annual Oxfordshire art bash, and can't withdraw, and haven't much to show, and need to ~~make~~ mount pictures & get stuff ready - it's all too much; but I don't want to leave going to Moscow until September, when I might be less mobile or having another op, and when my enthusiasm for what I am writing will have been delayed to the point of disappearance.

Meanwhile, since I've ~~taken off time to write to you, the British elections!~~ Unbelievable! For all our left-wing moaning about how Tony Blair's 'New Labour' had become new by discarding every principle, so that they were virtually indistinguishable from the Tories, we were all incredibly uplifted at the result. A landslide, a wipe-out - a result the polls kept foretelling but nobody believed they could be accurate. The whole of urban Britain, virtually, as gone New Labour. Tories are a sea of blue in the shires and country seats. Not a single Tory seat in the whole of Scotland and Wales. Labour returned in places that never ever had voted for anyone except a Tory. More women than had ~~we~~ ever been before: (for a short time, dropped when some Labour men forced it, ~~there~~ was a rule about women on short lists for candidature, and for giving them some safe seats). I think it's 107 women in a parliament of over ~~600~~. ~~600~~ - which may not sound much, but in British terms is phenomenal - bright, intelligent young women. Five women in the cabinet, which for years has been either all-male or with one token woman. It was as though a great sea of change swept over the whole country, and the feeling everywhere is of a dreadful burden being lifted. Such excitement! We all feel years younger, whatever New Labour does not do ~~(as they're still pledged to spend billions on useless nuclear tridents, and haven't any extra money for education and health)~~ the country has purged itself of a corrupt, miserable dishonest, viciously reactionary ruling party that - ~~beginning~~ beginning with the much-lauded Thatcher, made personal acquisitiveness a national virtue and literally changed social attitudes.

Whoopie! (Sour note: the new minister says he is not going to return the Elgin marbles. That was a pledge made by Kinnock, who is not in this government.)

But on that happy hopeful note - the triumph of optimism over experience - I will end.

With love

Hilda

Keith & Julie expecting my seventh grandson in a few days - after deciding never to have any children. But they are both HO, so this one is their first & their last.
My great grand-daughter - surgeons - visiting here from LA.

29 July 1997

Dearest Janet

I did think that I owed you a letter, and kept thinking about it but wasn't moved to write, until I got your note this morning. I kept thinking also of Mary's death - the prolonged dying of it - June didn't write after the memorial, so I was pleased to get your friend's account.

How did you get a broken leg? Or is it too boring to relate? I can imagine how frustrated you must feel. I am getting senile too, at least the memory part of me is. I know I liked 'None to Accompany Me', but can't remember what it was about (a jumble of Gordimer novels and short stories, some of which I have and some of which I haven't). I have been struggling my way through Annie Proux's Accordian Crimes. I loved Postcards and thought Shipping News one of the best novels I had read, but this one has proved difficult going - have you read it? Would like your opinion.

x I don't mean you are!

Did I write and tell you about Moscow? I don't think I did, and now my feelings about it are beginning to fade. It was something of a disaster. First, I didn't get the kind of information I wanted, and had to regard the trip (with poor Rusty with me) as a very expensive way of finding out very little. Second, Moscow is appalling. There are only two ways to go there at present. One is to be a business man and stay at the really expensive Western-style hotels that the Germans and others have built, being chauffeured and conducted around; the other is to go with a tourist group, when you are coached from place to place, see the museums and the sights, and don't have to find your own way around. As we did. Those huge wide streets are now crammed nose-to-tail with fast-moving traffic. Where there are no underpasses you can't get across. The pollution is horrific. Millions of trees all along the streets and to and from the airport are black and dying. The petty bureaucrats that strangers like ourselves have to deal with are disagreeable, rude, unhelpful. Ordinary people - this is a cliché for everywhere, I suppose - are lovely if you get to meet them, and we did meet a few. Little old women and men stand outside the Metro stations in the rain covered in plastic and selling packets of cigarettes or a few miserable flowers. Children beg on the Metro steps (when they can dodge the authorities.) Our hotel was appalling - that monstrosity, the Rossiya. All the worst traditions of both Tsarist and Soviet bureaucracy are rampant everywhere. I wish we had spent the money on going somewhere pleasant.

Despite these moans I am making headway with my book, but summer is distracting. We have been having some lovely days, the garden blooms, the birds are diverting, the plants, inside and out, need watering, every so often we go to London; or to Brighton to see my seventh grandson (now 2½ months old) who is so delightful I keep thinking about him (He's coming - with parents - to Oxford tomorrow.) Keith worried before he was born - 'I don't know if I will love him' he said to me. He's daft, besotted, crazy about him, keeps holding him, smelling his hair, gazing at him. He and wife Julie are both 40, so it's a late love.

My hip seems to be holding up, although I must walk with a stick (not around the house, but for any distance, even shopping); and I get all sorts of pains and things and keep thinking how lucky I am to be basically reasonably healthy and still active, as I see others deteriorating in one way or another. We went to the 90th birthday party of a long-time friend of ours (S African) in London yesterday, in a building in Regents Park with all the roses in bloom. He, like many others there, has shrunk into a little gnome with big ears, but his appetite for life in all its aspects is undiminished. His children asked Rusty to make a speech, and he made a delightful little speech. It does help, though, when you get old, to have money to cushion some aspects and to fulfil unfulfilled longings.

We are going to Edinburgh at the end of August to the Book Festival, where I have been asked to interview Gillian Slovo about her book about her family. Have you heard of it? It's getting tons of publicity, & I don't doubt one of these days she will be on a promotion tour in the USA. I have some reservations about the book, but look forward to the trip, lots of interesting things going on.

Much love Hilda

By air mail
Par avion



BC

Janet Stevenson

783 5th Avenue

Hammond

OR 97121

USA



Aerogramme

07



Name and address of sender

Hilda Bernstein
57 Lock Crescent
Kidlington
Oxon OX5 1HF
Phone 01865 37 3642

Postcode

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10 December 1997

Dearest Janet

You hadn't told me about the final episode in the Edinburgh/Hetty saga, and it made me laugh out loud. No, I didn't know about Alzheimers and I still don't know what the difference is between that and senile dementia, which is what my sister Vera's husband Morgan has. Vera is 87, still mentally bright, but physically in great difficulties with arthritis. She's been overweight all her life, and that doesn't help. She shows great patience with Morgan, but tells me she wishes she could go to sleep and not wake up again. She will not confine him to a home, she says, as long as he still recognises who she is.

All this sounds grim, and it seems as though all our friends who still survive have things going wrong that need repair, or that can't be repaired. That is why it is good to hear about you cavorting around the country, despite all the spare replacements. Where do you suggest we go while we're still mobile? And how will we manage when neither of us can carry things? We'll have to take Rusty along. That reminds me of a remark by Rebecca West: I can't really see the necessity for the existence of men, except that they're useful when you want to move the piano. I shouldn't think of Rusty in those terms, but really, he is indispensable for carrying things. (He has other qualities, too.)

Incidentally, we still haven't received our pension money, although Rusty's, at least, has actually been granted. It's something to do with transferring it to England, and we keep getting reassurances that it will eventually arrive. Meanwhile, we've started recklessly spending it - I've engaged a cleaner to come in once a week for a couple of hours to shift some of the accumulated dirt in our house, where neither Rusty or myself do any housework. And we are planning a holiday trip to SA, probably in February, as some friends have asked us to come and stay with them in Cape Town, and February is the grimmest month in the British calendar.

I'm enclosing copy of an article on Winnie, that says better than I could what I really think about her. I agree with it all. What happened when Nelson came out of jail was that two groups formed - those who had, as the article mentions, tried to control or curb her excesses, and those who wanted to stay in highest favour with Nelson. Thabo Mbeki, ever ambitious, was a strong supporter of the pro-Winnie group. And Cyril, far more upright in my opinion, fell into disfavour; for at that time, Nelson was still strongly supportive of Winnie. It was only after she flaunted her latest affair that the rift began.

Cyril should have been deputy-president. He has opted out of politics and gone into business. Thabo will make a passable, well-functioning president, as he is highly experienced and very diplomatic. But I don't trust him.

The two little photos. One, of course, was at the Delhi conference; but the one you think was Danny I'm not sure of; I think he might have been a British delegate. The other is Mary in China with her interpreter. Who else but a Chinese interpreter would wear white ankle socks with a skirt?

I must have told you that Keith and Julie, who had decided not to have children, slipped up in their old age and Hugh (my seventh grandson) was born in March. Keith was worried before he was born. I don't love him, and will I love him after he is born? Now he phones me before leaving on a photo assignments, reluctant to be away: Mom, I love my little boy; I love him more than anything else in the whole world. Well, he is very cute and lovable - Hugh, I mean.

We will go to Toni in London for Christmas, and Toni's son Mark and daughter-in-law Heidi will be coming from LA with their daughter Freya. Being a great grandmother doesn't matter to me one way or the other, but I can't quite cope with the fact that my little girl, who used to wear her hair in two pigtails, is now a grandmother.

Rusty finished his memoirs and sent them off to a publisher in SA. We await news. I've finished my book, and am giving a copy to two people to read for comments, but mainly to ascertain whether it is of interest to anyone but myself and my family. One of them Candida, was my editor on The Rift, and is very experienced; the other a journalist and critic. I really like the book, and will be devastated if the verdict is not good. But even if they approve, I will still have to find a publisher.

Now I'm going to read and read and read and draw pretty pictures.

January 30 1998

Dearest Janet

The long post-poned pension has started to arrive - at least a part of it; and we are off to SA in less than a week, staying for four weeks, back 6 March. First Jhbg to see relatives, friends, etc, and then Cape Town - glorious summer, warmth, sun, mountains, sea - I can't wait. February is the pits in England, the time when you just cannot bear the greyness, heavy overloaded miserable gloomy sky, the chill, any longer. To escape from here in Feb is just - - !

I can't bear to read or listen to one more word about Clinton. Look, I'm not saying we are any better here, but how is it possible for the world's only super-power to spend weeks on the contours of the Presidents penis? It's unbelievable. What a world! English has become the dominant world language, international capitalism the dominant world system, and Hollywood the dominant world culture.

Now look at this: Our wonderful New Labour gvt, with its huge majority, and all those pert, bright, intelligent young women. Blair keeps talking about 'hard choices.' It seems that these hard choices are all about women's choices. They have cut Lone Parent Benefit (mostly women, of course) for a work scheme to pressurise mothers of young children off benefit and into work. When this went through, a tiny handful of women MP's, plus a few men, voted against it. The others supported it. Now they are planning further steps that will affect women adversely. And all our lovely little MP's sit silent, or if called upon 'explain' why these policies are necessary.

We had a plethora of family over Christmas, all up and running. We were in Brighton yesterday to see our smallest grandson - gorgeous; and witness hard-headed Keith being besotted with a fat little 8-month-old baby. His wife too. Toni and Ivan have bought a small house in the Cape at a place called Nordhoek (they had a country house that they sold) and Toni has gone off to furnish and equip it. It's a way of investing the money they got from the Welsh house. We are becoming a family of property owners, it seems.

What about Joe? Could it be a brain tumour? Have they done scans?

Realising at last that I am suffering from a terminal illness - old age - I've been chucking things out. Found letters from you dating back to the 1960s - we've been writing to each other for a long time now. Like you, our friends succumb to age problems - my sister Vera's husband has senile dementia, and she, at 87 and with arthritis and other problems, has to care for him. There is social assistance, but the full-time job is hers. She says she would only consider putting him in a home if he no longer knew who she was. But he has lucid (short-term) moments,

but it's a heavy job for her, and she is lonely. We visit when we can - it's a long drive away - and talk on the phone. Her only daughter lives on the other side of London, and is the wage-earner, supporting a lazy husband and a little boy.

I've finished my book, and will send a copy to agent shortly. I'm taking sketch books and pencils to SA, and have decided to try and concentrate on drawing, not painting.

This letter has been interrupted several times - and I have a sore throat and too much to do. I enjoyed Edith's letter.

Oh, another thought. My grandson Mark gave us two air tickets to Edonburgh - he had some extra air miles. So we think we will go to the Festival again. How about coming over?

Much love

Hilda

Love to Karen

26 March 98

Dearest Janet

I bet if I post this tomorrow I will receive a letter from you the same day - but our life is becoming a bit hectic in our oldage, so I must write and tell you about it.

We had a marvellous time in SA. Some days in Jhbg, lunching and dining endlessly, staying with an old friend who is now a bachelor with a large house, very hospitable, just a few streets from where we used to live. Then to the Cape, first stayed with friends in beautiful gorgeous suburb of Constantia where all the rich Brits and Germans buy houses, then to Fish Hoek, on the Cape peninsular, staying with friends who rent house above sea, looking at mountains, and where again we over-ate and were over-entertained. The trick is, not to go there too often, so that they get used to you. Spacing it out is much better. We had lunch with the Deputy-Minister for Defence (formerly our friend Ronnie Kasrils) at Parliament, and listened in for a bit. Saw all our old friends now elevated to high positions. Went to Ronnie's house (not his own - the one he lives in while he's somebody) - gosh, how these old blokes in the United and Nationalist Parties, who built these great mansions on gorgeous estates liked to see themselves! Huge places, vast reception rooms, kitchens equipped for great formal dinners, outside vistas of beautifully designed and kept gardens - possibly few places in the world can match the lush and varied beauty of plants and flowers in the Cape. And Eleanor (Ronnie's wife) who lived for 25 years in a flat above a shop in Golders Green (London) with dustbins in the yard and an ^{10th} ~~entr~~ staircase . . . now queening it with security guards, posh cars, etc. I must say, she has adapted very well.

But the Cape! It is too beautiful. All you want to do is to look and look. We went to the gardens at Kirstenbosch (where they grow indigenous plants) and there was an exhibition of Zimbabwe sculptures - huge, gorgeous stone things set in this wonderful expanse of mountains and gardens. Spectacular!

Back to England. Ghastly flight in ever-smaller more cramped more crowded planes. Oh, to be able to afford Business Class! Even with a pension it's too dear. Two hours after we arrived home we get a phone call from the head of the University of Natal - they want to award R & me honorary degrees as Doctors of Laws, for our 'distinguished careers in public service.' Can you believe it? Would we be prepared to come . . . so we are going back to SA (Durban this time) on 20 April. Doctor of Laws (not Law) seems the right honour for two people whose careers were spent in breaking laws - R was on trial for treason twice in his life.

AND - another plus. R submitted his memoirs to two publishers in SA (there are only about two) and they both said they want to publish. So it is going to Penguin (South Africa) and should be ready by early next year. I am just so happy that he is getting recognition everywhere, for his reserved and retiring nature kept him out of the limelight; it took me years to realise that he really wanted this recognition, and the other part of his personality was not just a pose, but something deeply rooted in his past that he could never overcome.

Finally, finished my book and sent it to my agent, who thinks it is a remarkable story and is going to send it out to publishers. So wait and see.

The physical story is not so sheerful, but I'm seeing the Consultant next week. I'm a crumbling old woman, with bits falling off (hair, teeth) and lots of arthritic pains.

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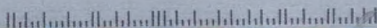
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Name and address of sender

Hilda Bernstein
57 Lock Crescent
Kidlington
Oxon OX5 1HF
Phone 01865 37 3642

Postcode

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I have just finished reading a biography of Mandela by a man called Martin Meredith, and will send you a copy as soon as I can organise to get one and the right packet, etc - I've had to stop driving because of cataracts - waiting for a hospital appointment - so have to rely on R all the time. Meredith came to see us several times when he was writing the book, and we both think it is the best book on NM that has appeared - including his own bio. He puts his life in its historical/political setting, and I think the way he deals with the whole Winnie saga is very good. It is also extremely readable.

All this happy clappy news doesn't leave any space for comment in British affairs - just as well. Just been listening to the news reports of the 11- & 13-year-old gunmen who have shot up four children and a teacher in the US. And feeble comments by Clinton. As though there's some secret reason nobody knows anything about! I can't dislike Blair half as much when I consider that his parliament has outlawed all privately owned handguns here. Much love to you & Karen

Hilda

May 9 1998

Dearest Janet

As time goes by I am beginning to think that we are the last of the letter-writing generation. At first it was fax, and without a fax we rely on Keith and Julie in Brighton to do our communications. Now I am asked 'Have you got e-mail'? and of course I have never advanced beyond the simplest use of an old-fashioned word-processor, and haven't the least desire to communicate by e-mail or to surf the net. But I can see the day will come . . .

Yes, the structure is seriously breaking down. You seem to specialise in falls and breaks, mine in a simple but steady deterioration: eyes and hips. Since my sight, particularly of one eye, is declining, I have given up driving and Rusty has to chauffeur me everywhere, and sit and wait long hours while the National Health does their tests. Then the hip replacement that wasn't perfect is becoming less so - off to a bone scan this week; uncertainty on steps; and much discomfort at night. So, between us, it looks as though we must plan some get together before it is too late for one or the other to move around safely. (Rusty is getting ever more deaf, so I listen and tell him, and he reads the small print and tells me.)

But to happier things. We had just the most wonderful time in Durban getting our honorary degrees. All that mumbo-jumbo ritual at which I have always turned up my nose - you know, the scarlet gowns, the capping and hooding (Maybe it's all different in the USA) the profession of academic worthies, the Orator making a speech about you full of grave errors, etc, etc, - well, I loved every minute of it. It's nice to be made to feel important! Rusty's brother and sister and spouses came from Joh'burg for the ceremony, and three close friends, and at the eleventh hour Frances came to SA as well - Keith phoned her the day before we left suggesting she should come, and offering to pay half her fair. She took a week off work and had a wonderful time, doing her own thing (Getting in touch with black choirs and visiting schools.) I made a speech about History, Language and Gender, which means the way we have to change social attitudes to match up to the extremely progressive Constitution we now have in SA - to make a reality of it. The women graduates were delighted. They put us up in a swish hotel. The University of Natal, which was formerly totally segregated, is trying hard to adjust to the new order, and I think their gesture to us was part of that adjustment.

We broke our journey back at Joh'burg, and then went to stay a couple of days with our friends (erst-while from Ethiopia, who have returned to SA) - they've bought a house in gorgeous countryside high on a hill among mountains in the Eastern Province - Mpulalanga. Stars at night such as you have never seen before, matchless scenery, strange bird-calls and wonderful end-of-summer balmy days. Our garden now is alight with tulips and growth, but Oxford seems rather mundane after all this luxury and glamour.

I hope Elizabeth Furse becomes Ambassador to SA. Our 'High Commissioner' in London is now a very bright young 'coloured' woman, Cheryk Walker, a most progressive choice for what is SA's most important Embassy abroad.

I finished my book and sent it off to my agent before we went away. Now it's just a matter of waiting to see if it finds a publisher - the book publishing industry is dire at present, independent publishers all mopped up by big cartels, and money and publicity going to 'best-selling' block-busters. We get more American here every day.

Karen, thank you for your letter and keeping me in touch with Janet's episodes. If you went to SA today you would be over-welcomed by the change in social attitudes, but depressed by the lack of progress on key issues: housing, education, unemployment which of course are all bound together. But there are great changes, and sometimes to us it seems like the world turned upside down. We keep thinking how fortunate we have been, both to have participated and to live to see it happen.

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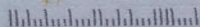
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Name and address of sender

Hilda Bernstein
57 Lock Crescent
Kidlington
Oxon OX5 1HF
Phone 01865 37 3642

Postcode

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Don't know if I told you that Rusty's memoirs, that took him more than three agonising years to write, have been accepted for publication in SA by Penguin (SA) and should be coming out at the beginning of next year. I reckon that's another good excuse to go to SA again. Toni and Ivan are broke, because the film industry in Britain is down the drain, and he has obtained a green card and gone to LA to see if he can get work there. Keith is the envy of all males, as he has been appointed official photographer for the World Cup by Canon(camera-makers) - he is not particularly interested in football! His late-come little boy is the joy and delight of his life. It's a pity it turned out another boy, but he is a delightful, sweet, easy-going lovable babe. How are things going in the grandmother department at your end?

Much love to you both

Hilda

11 May 98

(continuation of the air-letter)

. . . which I had finished, sealed, and was awaiting posting, when your letter of 5 May arrived. So this is an addendum.

Talking about bones: ever since I went on to HRT my osteoporosis and not deteriorated to any notable extent - that is, it seemed to halt the deterioration. It works for some, not for others. Do you take it? However, the USA is usually ahead of Britain in medical matters (sometimes rashly ahead) so maybe you know all the alternatives open to you. If any.

I don't know if you did write previously about Marshall Tate, but it's lovely news, for all concerned. Does visiting involve a long journey? Keith and Julie's fatboy Hugh is only in Brighton, which on the map isn't far away, but in terms of congestion on roads and inefficiency on rail takes a long time. And I'm dying to see him again.

I don't know if you will find Rusty's memoirs any more uplifting than the depressing stuff you read every day. They are political memoirs dealing with the nuts and bolts of the liberation movement of that period - how the underground CP was formed, the Congress of the People, and such like things. I think they are interesting and important as an historical record of that time, the other participants being now mostly dead. Our fame is soundly based on our ability to have survived, at least longer than most of our contemporaries. It's an interesting thought that Mandela, Sisulu, Kathrada, etc, survived because they were in jail, while the other ANC-CP activists - Nkobi, Dadoo, Kotane, Marks, Ruth - many others - died of strokes, heart attacks, alcoholism or murder by the Nationalist Govt. We don't think the memoirs will be published before the beginning of next year.

I can't help you with suggestions about how to kill. What I would like to know is how to dispose of oneself when you want to go. Painlessly, of course. My eldest sister, Vera, now 87, suffering from arthritis, overweight, failing knees, ;limited ability to get around, but still mentally lively, now has to care for her husband who has senile dementia, a burden that gets steadily worse. She phones me on the two mornings a week that he is taken to some centre for similarly afflicted people, as otherwise she can't talk about what it's like. She lives 1½ hours (by car) away from us, so we don't visit regularly. She finds it a sad and terrible burden and longs to go to sleep and not wake up.

Why am I telling you this? To finish off the page. Much love



26 June 98

Dearest Janet

The reviews of the two books that you sent to me were interesting. First, about the Washington Post man (Glenn Frankel) who did the reviews: He came to see us a couple of years ago with the intention of writing a book about whites who were in 'the struggle' (as it is now called.) His intention was to write about four white families and their children - Bernsteins, Slovos, Wolpes and Fischers. He stayed with us on two or three visits, very nice man, we liked him. Also he gave us a copy of a book he had written about Israel - Beyond the Promised Land, a Pulitzer Prize winner (if that means anything) and, we thought, the best book we had read about contemporary Israel/Palestine.

The Slovo daughters did not want to cooperate (they've written, and been written about, so much, I don't blame them). Gradually the book became more and more about the Bernsteins. He has recently sent us a copy of his final draft. We (me and Rusty) don't think it is very good. There is nothing that we object to in it, and it may be all right for an American audience, but mainly he has drawn so heavily on my book, Ruth's jail diary, and AnneMarie Wolpe's book that it did not present anything very new or profound to us. However, for his sake - he gave up many months of work at the Post to do it - I hope it will be published.

Of the two books he reviewed, the one by Martin Meredith on Mandela is, in my opinion, very good, and worth reading. He puts a lot into perspective, including Winnie. See if you can get it. The other, the bio of Bram, is a heavy, over-long disappointment. He spent 14 years writing it and it is therefore chockful of detail, yet somehow never captures the true character of the man. I couldn't read it all, and skipped.

I've read of some of the vicissitudes of the Oregon law on the right to die. My sister Vera - nearing 88 - almost immobile with arthritis, overweight, and lifetime problems, is tied to caring for her senile dementia husband, steadily deteriorating. Her life is hell, physically and mentally, and she says she only wishes she could go to sleep and not wake up; but like the rest of us, doesn't know how to do it. She could put Morgan into a home, but she keeps saying that as long as he still recognises her, she can't bear to do it, as he is so confused and pathetic. I wish I knew how Bunny did it. It doesn't gag me - it's something we all think about.

I think your 'journal' is a great idea. Nothing is cheating, it doesn't have to be accurate in detail about time and place and so on. I've been thinking of writing - like you did - not for publication, something I am always thinking about: Why I was such a passionate Communist? What was I searching for? What was it all about? Just trying to understand my own life and the ideas that shaped it. At present, however, I am not doing anything, which means the day gets filled with meaningless domestic and other trivia, because without a project it has become unstructured, and I find I do need some structure to my days. There are plenty of things to divert me from getting down to anything - the garden needs a lot of things done to it, my pot plants need re-potting, spraying, etc; mundane tasks like shopping and tidying up take longer than they used to, I am tired before the day is done and want to sit with my swollen ankles up - and so on. But even at this age it doesn't satisfy. I want to draw again, but nothing around me inspires me or gets me going.

HRT is Hormone Replacement Therapy, which is simply taking daily pills of hormones (some take them by patches on the skin - these irritated my skin.) It evidently doesn't work as well for everybody, but for me it has been a life-saver. I started some years ago. A reactionary old doctor said I was too old to start taking them, but a progressive young one said

nonsense. After taking them for some time I had a bone-scan, which showed that for the first time in some years bone density had not decreased, in fact had slightly improved. Permanent pains in (mainly) arms went away. I had already lost 2 inches in height by spine compacting. This stopped. There have been no side-effects whatsoever. I don't know what Fossamax is - everything has different names here.

We haven't got e-mail. We haven't even got a fax, and have to rely on Toni and Keith. We haven't got computer equipment that can use e-mail. We are living in the dark ages. But we hope to go to Edinburgh for a part of the Book and Big Festival - our grandson Mark, gave us air tickets from his air miles.

Keith has been in France for the World Cup - the photo people Canon appointed him their official photographer. We're off to see him and his little one this weekend (in Brighton). There is nothing but football, Wimbledon and cricket on TV, newspapers, talk, everywhere. It drives most of the women mad. Rusty also sits in front of the telly watching tennis and cricket all day - football if there is nothing else on.

Lots of stuff in the papers these days - and on telly - about how women are so much cleverer, better, more sensitive, more positive than men. As if we didn't always know!

*No comments on new 'labour' government. Not good
for one's blood pressure*

Much love

Jill

August 17 1998

Dearest Janet

Short note as we are leaving [✓] for Edinburgh tomorrow for a week - free air tickets from grandson Mark (who was here from LA earlier in year and had some spare air miles) and free accommodation from ex-South African living just outside Ed. who we met when we were there last year.

Don't know about Tutu talkin Nelson into marriage - it was Gracia who didn't want to get married at first because she has a high position in Mozambique and was afraid that it would damage her standing. I think as his Presidency is now drawing to a close it was no longer a stumbling block. He wanted to get married from the beginning.

Awaiting Defending the Spirit which I haven't heard of or seen reviewed here. But as for the US role in propping up certain regimes - thought this cutting would interest you. So much extraordinary stuff has come out of the TRC, some so bizarre it's almost unbelievable. We have a wonderful book on the TRC, but it is so far unavailable here - givento us by an SA friend. It may be published here, if so, will send a copy.

At the moment I'm in a big US/hate mood - but don't think it's only the US. (Just been reading about what BP is doing in Columbia - devastating the countryside and robbing people of their livelihood. No, capitalism rampant is not unique to the US) But I feel that so rich, so powerful, so enormously endowed a country could have been generous to Kenyan victims of the bombing - offered financial aid to the bereaved, something. They only want to care for their own.

Going back to BP - they are tying up with AMACO - I read that BP/Amaco are the main corporate players in an increasing turbulent political arena in former Soviet Republics in the east, ~~plus~~ Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan where oil companies are working with the Taliban; oil being one of the most potent local destabilising forces So much to say on this issue.

I need cataract op on both eyes. National Health waiting list one year. A consultant has said he will try to help me jump the queue to six months. Meanwhile, fading sight, so stopped driving.

Horrible bombing in Ireland. I can't stop thinking of the bereaved; as in the Kenyan affair. So pointless, evil, hateful.

Can't start to comment on our own politics - holding noses is not sufficient. One wants to crawl away and bury heads in sand.

Love Sheila

About the end of November

Dearest Janet

Are you still there? Somehow I've lost track of who last wrote to whom, and when, but feel, whatever, it's a long time. And when we get news from SA of our particular circle of friends, it feels that so many have died or are dying (the men, mostly, the women outlive them - prostrate cancer, lung cancer - a heavy smoker - heart) and we feel like survivors precariously clinging on. Old, decrepit, full of the usual troubles of age - cataract operations (me) angina (Rusty). ~~AND~~ And this time of the year adds to the gloom - the day is so short, so often grey and overcast. We get up later and go to bed earlier. For nearly two months I felt dead - no energy, over-tired, couldn't get on with anything. I complained to Toni and told her I felt as though I had S.A.D. (Seasonal Affective Disorder - do you have the same term?) and also ME. She looked at me and said 'You can't think it might be old age?'

Devastating. But I've recovered, although not doing anything productive. My book has been turned down by a raft of publishers, very depressing, as I think it is both interesting and original. I worry about Rusty, who is getting very slow - not mentally, but physically, small amounts of effort leave him exhausted.

Have I written since Edinburgh? No. We went there towards the end of August, saw some excellent fringe plays, and were due to appear at the screening of a film by SA's about Cecil Williams, who was gay, but associated with us, and was the 'chauffeur' driving Mandela ~~was~~ when he was arrested. But my eldest sister, Vera, died suddenly under rather traumatic circumstances, so we flew back. Long, depressing story, too complicated to write, but that must have contributed to my physical un-wellbeing

How are the grandchildren? Do you get to see them fairly often? I now have two great-grand-daughters, both in LA, and together with Toni and Ivan we are flying out there for Christmas to see them, to get a bit of sunshine, to avoid all the dreadful over-consumerism of Christmas in this country, to make a change, and because Toni wanted to see her grand-daughters and thought it was a good idea to take the old folks along, and arranged it all. We will be back on 28 December. I wish ~~there~~ there were some way I could include Oregon in the trip, but the kind of cheapish airmile tickets we have don't allow for deviations or breaks in the journey. Please come and see me, Janet.

I never did get my SA pension (bureacracy - they're actually waiting for me to die so they don't have to pay it) but Rusty got his, so we have some more freedom than in the past to travel. My ambition is to go on travelling, but always what we call 'business class' - I don't even aspire to first - so that it becomes more endurable. (unrealized)

The pension doesn't cover that.

Rusty's memoirs are still in the hands of his publishers who do not seem to have fixed a date for publication, almost never communicate with him (It's Penguins in South Africa); and everyone keeps asking about them. I think they are very good, and everyone who has read them (including family, of course, but not only) think they are excellent. But mainly of interest to South Africans, and historians and such-like.

I don't want to start commenting on the political situation, both here and in your country. Can we take it that generally we must be more or less agreed? We never expected a fundamental revolution from our Tony Blair and the Labour Party, but at the beginning there were such lovely signs - all those young women who ~~xxx~~ were elected, including twin sisters, one of whom is gay; a young disabled woman in a wheel chair - the first ever in the House of Commons - and so on. Yes, they've done a few things, they're better than the last lot, but oh! A huge majority in Parliament that has betrayed so many fundamental things.

What are you reading these days? Did I promise to send you any books, and if so, what were they?

Love to Karen, and much love to you

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