

From: Benjamin Pogrand,
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14th May, 1967.

REGISTERED POST

Mr Robert M. Sobulwe,
c/o Officer Commanding,
Robben Island Gaol,
Robben Island,
VIA CAPE TOWN.

My dearest Bob,

Your letter of April 6 and the two of April 12, which both, or rather all, reached me a few days ago, provided most entertaining reading -- and in your references to your views on Christianity, most thought-provoking reading. But I so much enjoyed the letters, and thank you for them. Your writing style is superb -- and in English at that! -- and I wonder whether you are not in fact the potential candidate for the writing of that Great South African Novel for which we are all still waiting. The teasing aside, these letters really were great. And having read that you won the Eastern Province Fennis Single in 1944, I am as suitably impressed as were the children. I see you now in a new light, and realise how grievously I have underestimated you.

Firstly, about your material needs. The winter coats will, I hope be sent off on Saturday or Monday at the latest. The chair I have written to people in Cape Town about (sorry, the grammar of this sentence has got a bit cock-eyed -- see how your new image as a sharp tennis player causes me to offer these apologies), and I hope that a new one will soon be reaching you. I hope to be able to send a new radio to you -- FM, of course -- by early next week. Actually I am a bit upset about the question of the chair as some months ago I suggested to people that a new one be sent to you and I was assured that it would be done. I note and accept your reservations about the other matters about the environment. How can I phrase my reaction to reading it? You expressed it so nobly. I know that you will squint at my use of this word, but you will just have to accept it from me as there is no other way to put it. On the radio, you did not say whether you would prefer to have a mains-operated instead of battery set. Have you been sitting under that tree outside, basking in the sun and listening to soft music? I have often stumbled at the memory of our conversation along these lines the last time we saw each other. I think a mains set would be best as it would save you the bother of batteries. What I think I will do is to ensure that an extra long lead is included with the set so that you can have the radio outside if you wish it. If I recall correctly, you have two power points, in your bedroom and kitchen, so I hope this plan will be all right. On the bedspread, I wasn't quite sure from your letter whether I should send it or not. But I shall play safe and send it anyway, and hope that this is indeed what you want.

I plead not guilty on the question of the choice of clothing. I did my best to get you exactly what you had ordered, but the outfitters I went to

did not everything exactly as you wanted, so I had to approximate as closely as I could. Anyway, I am glad that everything was to your taste. In the list you gave of what you had received you omitted to mention the balancara. I included one -- not the exact colour you wanted, I must admit, because they didn't have it -- but it was included. Is there any way in which you could check whether it has gone astray? Was the invoice included with the parcel, perhaps? I shall also check with the outfitters that they did in fact send it.

I'm writing to you from work -- I've been doing a lot of night work lately as night news editor, and I am able to write now as it is a slack night, after a public holiday, with little happening in the world around, except for the occasional phone calls disturbing me. A few minutes ago, it passed midnight: it's now May 5 and my 34th birthday. And hell, Bob, I do feel old sometimes these days!

About "Economica": this has not been reaching me at all regularly, but as they come in I send them on to you. I think I had better write direct to them and ask them to post it straight to you. Under separate cover I am also sending you the latest booklist from the Economist's Bookshop in Britain. If there are any books you need or want, will you please let me know? I was surprised that the same papers had not reached you as I ordered these a long time ago. I am checking to see what happened. Sorry about this, Bob. I hope it has not affected your studies. When are you writing, by the way? I thought you were now on your second year of study but you mention that you will be writing your finals next year.... I thought you had planned to spend two years on each annual one year or have I got it all wrong?

I am glad the books are proving OK. Another batch was recently delivered for you by the same old friend of mine and I am enclosing the list which she has sent me. I have asked her to go on supplying you with books of the same quality. Also, in the next few days I shall post off another batch of Argosys. I shall also send off some of the magazine supplements of the London Sunday Times. Although foreign, they are straight literary supplements and I cannot see how there can be any possible objection to them. Some have extracts of the Manchester book on Kennedy -- I didn't worry about sending these to you regularly as I know that you receive the Johannesburg Sunday Times which also published them. Will you let me know whether the supplements get to you?

Turning to your letter of April 12, thank you Bob for what you write about my going. There is still a great deal of hesitancy within me, but on balance I accept that it must be done. I most certainly do regard it as "preparatory work for service to Africa", as you put it. My greatest hope is to land up in a U.S. university, where I will have the chance of broadening my knowledge of this continent through study and visits. I am too deeply emotionally involved with South Africa and with Africa as a whole to try to contemplate an existence separated from it. This is my existence. You know, nearly ten years ago, when I went to the UK for about six weeks, I had to come back in a hurry for domestic reasons. I hadn't particularly wanted to return -- in London, I found a freeing of the spirit and I revelled in being there. But however much I might deny all the talk of the "mysticism" of Africa -- and I do tend to scoff at it -- I know that as I flew down the continent, and peered through the plane's windows at the ground far below, and touched down at Nairobi and Salisbury and then Johannesburg, I simply knew inside me that this was my home. Oddly enough, I found also that out of the antagonism which I had had in London came a surging desire and direction to work for what I believed in this country. And then followed the most fruitful period of my life. Now that I have written all this, I remember that I have previously spoken to you

along these lines. So forgive please the reminiscent ramblings of an old man on his 34th birthday.

Anyway, what I am trying to say is that I am part of this place — the broader Africa of which you are so acutely aware, and that it is in the service of that Africa that I would wish to spend my life. Speaking to any other person I would feel that this was a melodramatic statement. I know that I need not have this reservation with you.

I have, of course, a great deal of worry within me of how best to fulfill this, while maintaining a reasonable life. I am worried particularly about not becoming like so many South African expatriates of whom I have heard — pining away, frittering away their lives in useless activity (or what I regard as useless, anyway). Sitting here now, I tend to feel that I will have to be strict with myself and aim at covering my close emotional ties with this country as quickly as possible, while trying at the same time to broaden my interests northwards, equally as rapidly as possible. How this will work out I just don't know, and I might well be talking around nonsense and it will all prove to be vastly different, once I am out of here.

Some time ago, when I first wrote to you about M, I also told you about another woman with whom I had been terribly close. Well, last year, as I think I told you, I virtually sent her away, both for her own sake and because I felt things could not work out between us. That was in October last year. Since then, we have continued to write and to speak also occasionally on the phone. And we have both realized that our feelings have remained as strong as ever. In February I took the step of asking her if she would wait for me, and she agreed. When I go to the UK I shall be going to her and we intend seeing if, in the different quieter atmosphere of living there, we can resolve those differences between us. She is a married woman, Bob, with two children. We are hoping that her husband will agree to a divorce but so far he has refused. It is a tangled story which I can't embark upon at this stage — except to give you my assurance that I was not the cause of their marriage breaking up. She was already seeking a divorce when we first met. She is a remarkable woman, highly intelligent, attractive, with extraordinary perception of people — and particularly of me! She has great courage and has demonstrated this while still in this country. She is intensely alive and vital, a woman who fills my every need. Both of us are aware of the problems we have, and we both accept that we just do not know if things will work out between us. But we also both accept that we must come together in a sane environment and see whether we still wish to be together. In the meantime, I shall be going to live with her in London and it is with her that I shall be making my initial adjustment to leaving this country, and to leaving behind my Jennings, you, my Parents. Of course, she knows a great deal about you — and accepts you as my brother. You can be sure, Bob, that should we marry, our home will be a home too for the four children. For that matter, whatever happens to me, you know, as indeed you have shown that you know by what you wrote, that my home is their home also.

With the phone interruptions and the odd accident to attend to, it's now nearly 1³⁰ and I still have lots to write about. I think I shall end off this letter and continue writing over the weekend. I shall post this off tomorrow (today).

Affectionately,

rather!

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