

From: Benjamin Pogrund,
804, Doromo,
Van der Merwe Street,
Hillbrow,
JOHANNESBURG.

25th April, 1966

REGISTERED POST

Mr Robert M. Sobukwe,
c/o Officer Commanding,
Robben Island Gaol,
ROBBEN ISLAND,
via Cape Town.

My dear Bob,

Your letter of March 30 reached me on Friday. I was surprised to learn that none of your text books had reached you yet. I have gone into the matter without delay. Will you let me know as soon as the books get to you? They will be arriving in different batches. Actually, this whole question of whether books get to you or not is a frustrating one as I am never certain whether anything has gone astray in the post. Whenever books reach you, can you please send me a complete list so that I can know what is happening? In my letters of March 23 and 28 I referred to a carton of books which I had just sent to you per passenger train, and I trust that this has now arrived.

Your telegram asking for an electric kettle was received, and on April 15 I wired you advising that Stuttafords were posting a kettle to you that day. I hope that this too has arrived and that it is OK.

While I think of it, how are you placed for winter clothing? Sheets, blankets, a heater, trousers, jerseys, pyjamas, socks, shoes, shirts, underwear, etc? You notice that I carefully specify each possible item because long experience of you has shown me that you are reluctant to tell me of your needs unless I pinpoint each article! Whatever you need, please let me know so that I can have it sent to you.

I was delighted by your story of Miliswe's letter to you.... and very flattered also by it. There is nothing more honest than a child, and I am glad to know that I am accepted by her. I had heard that "Ausi Mary" had met your wife and kids on the train -- also that she spoilt them outrageously by plying them with sweets.

When I sent you "Writing with a purpose", there was no hidden motive in my mind. But now that you mention it, I have been wanting to write to you for some time to urge you to have a stab at some serious writing. If you feel able to write some kind of a "witchdoctor" tale, you'll make a lot of money...I'll gladly act as your agent so that I can share the spoils with you. But apart from any such straightforward commercial venture, I have for long wondered why we have not yet produced any great story about African existence. I am thinking of the African in the city: the amount of material exists on a vast scale, with every conceivable aspect of human suffering and emotion waiting to be set down on paper. There is of course Alan Paton's "Cry the beloved country", which I admire intensely. But without, I hope, being racialistic, I have always been surprised at the lack of penetrative writing by Africans themselves. Zeke Mphahle, Bloke Modisane and others have written on the subject, but none in my view comes anywhere near the power and insight which Paton displayed. Now how about you dashing off the "great South African novel"?

I'm not being flippant about this: for a variety of highly complimentary reasons -- with which I shall not embarrass you -- I have always looked forward to your producing some outstanding fictional writing about people. I remember, when I first met you, that you told me that you wrote poetry. Are you still doing this, and if so, wouldn't you send up some of your writing to me?

There is another point, although I am not too certain whether this is the best time and place to raise the question. What about some autobiographical writing? You have reached a sufficiently advanced stage in your life where you can attempt such a work without running the risk of being accused of overweening vanity! Wasn't it Randolph Churchill who wrote his first autobiography at the age of about 21? I warn you: if you don't do it, I shall have to do it for you! And I promise you that it will not be nearly as sympathetic a portrait as if you had done it yourself. I hope this dire warning will frighten you into getting down to the job without any further ~~shaky~~ delay.

Thank you for the love for Jenny, which she heartily reciprocates. She continues as adorable as ever. In my letter of March 28 I sent you a picture of her and I hope this has reached you safely.

You will be observing your "anniversary" on May 3. My thoughts and my prayers, as always, will be with you.

God bless you.

With great affection,

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- **Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand**

Location:- **Johannesburg**

©2010

LEGAL NOTICES:

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

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

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

DOCUMENT DETAILS:

Document ID:- **A2618-Ba4-28**

Document Title:- **Letter to Sobukwe, Robben Island (registered, copy) and transcript**

Author:- **Benjamin Pogrund**

Document Date:- **25 April 1966**