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From: Benjamin Pogrand,
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20th July, 1966.

REGISTERED POST

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

My dear Bob,

Thank you for your letters of June 1 (which arrived on June 16) and June 29 (which arrived on July 16). I can hardly believe that more than a full month has passed since your first letter arrived. I am sorry I have been so slow in replying.

I have been delighted to share in the surprises for your wife's birthday, and happy also that my suggestions for gifts are acceptable to you. I saw your wife yesterday and can report that she is keeping very well indeed. All being well, I hope that she will be visiting you next month. We worked out the details of a visit and she is now going to find out when she can take leave from the clinic. She will travel to Cape Town for about two weeks just as soon as this can be arranged. So something good for you to look forward to.

I was upset yesterday, however, to discover that I had just missed the children, as they had returned to school the previous day. The new term apparently starts unexpectedly early. Your wife assured me that they are well, and are also doing well at school this year, Miliewe in particular (she has come second in class).

Naturally I did not let on to your wife as to what is in store for the 27th. But I shall be seeing her on that day and will have pleasure in handing her the various presents. My only regret is that you will not also be there.

I have also, today, written to Miliswe telling her how sorry I was that I did not see her. I have sent some money to the school for pocket money for the children, and have told Miliswe that, should she wish to send her mother a telegram, or even a small gift, she should go ahead and make use of this money. I see also that it is Miliswe's birthday on July 30: I shall be sending her a small gift for this.

Enclosed please find copy of a letter which I have sent to the Officer Commanding, Robben Island Gaol. As you will see from the letter, I have deposited R15.00 to be used by you on whatever purchases you may wish to make. I did this after seeing your wife, and have arranged with her that any future monies which you may need will be channelled through me. So when this amount runs short, will you please let me know? Another idea which strikes me: in the past, whenever you have needed a kettle or a heater or anything like that, we have had to go through the process of your advising me, etc. Wouldn't it be simpler if you were to purchase the goods from Stuttards in Cape Town and have it charged to me? I have an account with them, both in Cape Town and up here, so there is no problem about the accounts side. All you would then have to do would be to let me know whatever you buy so that I could check the accounts. Can you find out from the jail authorities if this will be in order for you to do? And if it is, please let me know and I shall drop a line to Stuttards asking them to give you all cooperation in making purchases. The fruit parcels, by the way, have been extended and I hope that they are still reaching you safely and that you are enjoying them.

Also enclosed is R2.00 of 2½c and R2.00 of 5c. stamps, as requested by you. Sorry I have taken so long to get them to you.

I note that, this year, you have not replied to my inquiries about your need for jerseys, other clothing, blankets, etc. Are you quite ware that you do not need anything?

I am tremendously relieved that, at long, long last, the study books are beginning to reach you. I am deeply sorry about the lengthy delays, but they were virtually unavoidable. There are still quite a lot more to come so will you please continue to let me know as they arrive? Also, I am at present putting together a bundle of lighter reading material for you and this will be sent down, I hope, within the next few days.

Re my illness: I had a narrow escape from an operation which apparently would have been an unnecessary one. My doctor had flatly told me that I had to have an operation, and I was reconciled to this. The surgeon, etc had already been chosen. Then I insisted on getting an opinion from Dr Mozie Suzman (Helen's husband), who is probably the top man in this country. He came to see me and ruled out an operation entirely. He took over my treatment, and although I am on a daily diet of tablets, I am feeling pretty well -- in fact, far, far better than I have for a long time past. I stayed in hospital only for about ten days, but the rest and good food (I never did get round to asking for that snake) did me a world of good. It was just what I needed to get me on my feet again. On doctor's orders -- and also because I have long felt the need of it -- I now also do a lot of exercise. I go to horse-riding twice a week, and this is magnificent fun, although I think you would split your sides if you saw me in my jodphurs and black riding hat cantering along. Ernie and Jill have joined me in this and we go out first thing on Sunday mornings for an hour riding around the Bryanston countryside. I also took up judo but soon had to retire temporarily when I tore a ligament in my chest. I fear I am just too old for this particular violent game, Bob, but I'm determined to go on pretending that I am still a young man and I intend resuming classes again next week. Sometimes, when I had first started, I wasn't too sure whether the cure was not worse than the illness: I just never knew which part of my body was aching more!

Then, at the office, since the start of June, I have been doing sub-editing. It had long been thought a good idea for me to gain this experience -- it is all to do with making up a newspaper -- and advantage has been taken of the current "lull" to get me in there. I shall probably be doing subbing until the end of August, and will then, I hope, go back to writing, all else being equal. I find subbing absolutely dreadful, and am bored to tears by it. Knocking what other people have written into shape seems to me to be a particularly pointless way to spend an evening. One little side-effect is that the so-called work hardly taxes my abundant energies at all, with the result that when I come off duty at midnight or 1 am, I am usually still wide awake...so I tend to drift round at that time of the night or sit and read until the early hours, wake up early and am thoroughly tired by late afternoon when the working day is just starting! It must sound rather mad to you, and I assure you that it is.

Thank you for your message for Jenny, who is adorable as ever. We were in Cape Town together over the long weekend at the end of May, and walking along the Sea Point beachfront, I used to point out the Island as the place where her Uncle Bob lived.

Her latest nursery school report, for the end of June, has filled me with delight. After noting that her temperamental outbursts have ceased, it continues: "In the school situation she has become cooperative and reasonable and much more emotionally self-reliant. She responds best to positive suggestion and is not so prickly to criticism. This warm and affectionate little girl shows increased maturation emotionally and socially." What pleases me here is the fact that Jenny has come through the trying period of the separation, and is showing herself to be a remarkably adjustable child. And above all, she is the "warm and affectionate little girl", as the report describes her. She celebrated her fifth birthday this month, by the way, and is quite the young lady.

On your remarks about Africans producing a great social novel: I don't class you -- at the present time, -- as either a "peasant" or a "worker" (whatever other phrases others might use about you!) This is so whatever your origins in the past. And to take it a step further, even after allowing for the restrictions of existence in our country, there are many Africans -- to be counted in their thousands or even tens of thousands -- who despite their peasant or worker origin, have through education and economic advancement become middle class in their mode of living and in their outlook. This being so, surely the fact that an oppressed peoples are too busy merely keeping their bodies together does not explain the lack of good writing in South Africa? Particularly when the process of numbers of people breaking out of and away from their origins has been going on at an accelerating tempo since well before the turn of the century (although -- to anticipate your retort -- at that stage, only a handful was involved. But during the last 20 years, you would surely agree that a great many in number have been involved in this changing process?)

This is all for now. I shall be writing again soon. In the meantime, look after yourself, and study hard.

God bless you,

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