

29.7.79

[There's a hand-written note at the top of the letter which says: Afgekeur. Gee verwitting. Beswaar teen Alan Paton]

Dear Dr Paton,

This is my third attempt to reach you during the last 15 years. I first wrote to you immediately I could send out more than just two letters a year, and I thanked you for your courageous response of June 1965. It was not so easy those days to come forward as you did and few people are likely to forget that inspiring gesture.

In the second letter I expressed my sympathies on the passing away of your first wife. I pointed out that the tragedy, coming so soon after the death of your friend, Chief Luthuli, must have been exceptionally difficult to endure. I mentioned the Browns, Kupers and the late Dr Edgar Brookes and asked you to give all of them my fondest regards.

I hope the letters reached you and that your long silence is due to pressure of engagements. If they did not, then I will hardly blame you if you think our sense of gratitude is not very high. I have taken the precaution of registering this particular one to make sure that it reaches you.

When I and a friend visited their house Mrs Brown served us with coffee and buttered scones so fresh and soft that they went down before one could chew. Almost two decades have passed since that day, yet the memory of that visit has not faded. I also met the Kupers only once; in their house in Durban. Although I am confident that they will never cease burrowing wherever they may be, I was sorry to hear that they had emigrated. Their contribution in the fields of education and literature has been impressive and their exit must have weakened their school of thought in several directions. As a matter of fact, I first heard of their emigration when I was trying to order their work on the African bourgeoisie. Unfortunately, the book was unknown to the firms approved by this Department. Though I have never had the honour of meeting Dr Brookes, our generation of students in Native Administration, as the subject was then known, knew of him quite well. He was widely acknowledged as the leading authority on that topic. I was sorry to learn of his death and would be pleased if you would kindly give my condolences to his family.

In March last year my wife told me that you had visited her in Brandfort. Even at our best moments in Johannesburg, such visits always left us with a tremendous feeling. Today they assume a special significance and I was happy to know that many of our friends could have the courage and time to travel to Brandfort bringing good wishes to the

family. I was also pleased to know that you made it possible for my daughter-in-law Rayne, to return to college. I saw her only once when she came down in 1974. She struck me as a sweet and ambitious child who is keen on education. I hope she will not disappoint those who love and wish her well. The other day I read your article in Fair Lady of January 31 on your visit to Zindzi in Brandfort. Unfortunately I could neither keep it nor make notes. Still it struck me as a powerful story and a shot in the arm for the young lady. To be introduced to the readers of Fair Lady by a well-known and experienced writer is a flattering compliment to Zindzi. When I reached the last line "joy was great and sorrow small."

A few days before I saw your review I had read an article in this months issue of the Readers' Digest. It attempted to analyse the problems facing amateur writers in the country. To illustrate the point, the writer referred to the number of manuscripts received by various publications and the number accepted by each. Among the magazines mentioned in the article is Fair Lady which in 1977 received about 700 fiction manuscripts. According to the writer, it published only fifty of these most from overseas. In the light of these I thought it significant that Zindzi's efforts had attracted the attention of such a selective magazine. I will try to keep my hand clean so that I can give you a firm handshake when we meet.

It is because you have many good friends whose support and encouragement has been a source of tremendous inspiration that Zindzi has been inspired to urge the tomorrow to "increase your speed, I eagerly await you."

The family has experienced a lot of problems some of which you are aware. In my current position it is difficult to handle even such personal problems. It is much more difficult to intervene when such problems go beyond first degree relatives. But if the road between Hillcrest and Brandfort should cave in on the sides and develop potholes, I would do everything in my power to repair it, to clear any debris that might block the free passage of the love and goodwill that characterises the relations between our respective families. Particularly at this moment, I like you never to forget that.

I do not know what works you published during the last 17 years, and I have no means of knowing. All I can tell you is that I am confident that you have not been idle. In fact, last year I heard that an American university had awarded you an honorary doctorate. Although I have no other information on the matter, I was happy to receive the news. Such an honour was well-deserved. That award has a personal and wider significance. For one thing it shows that your labours have not been in vain, that in spite of persistent droughts and choking weed, you sowed on good ground, that "the harvest is late; it has not failed." My love and fondest regards to you and your wife, and to all the friends mentioned above.

Sincerely,

NR Mandela.

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Dr Alan Paton, P.O. Box 278 Hillcrest 3650, Natal.