

LETTER FROM WINNIE MANDELA
TO NELSON MANDELA

2/7/70

Mfowethu,¹⁹⁵

I still cannot believe that at last I've heard from you darling. You will notice the very difference in the handwriting, the hypnotising effect your lovely letters have on my scarred soul. All it needed was its natural drug after all. Although my state of mind is not highly receptive at the moment I have tried as best I could to photostat your last letter in my mind, as you know I haven't the privilege of keeping your letters, I'm just given enough time to read them.

I take it you were told I was remanded in absentia on the 18th of June with 18 others on alleged charges under the Terrorism Act. I was so deeply hurt by not being fit to be with my colleagues. I have been seeing the defence team with them though but the indictment has not been served yet. Last Thursday I saw Niki and Uncle Marsh, I was thrilled darling, it was a lovely reunion disturbed as they were by my appearance. From now henceforth I should improve each day. I do not know yet whether the reports from the various specialists are available [but] I shall let you know as soon as I have been advised of same.

As you say, our goal is [a] free Africa my love I have never had any doubts about that. You flatter me so much when you referred to your 'self praise', vanity which I call my natural drug Hugo once said, 'No power on earth can prevent an idea whose time has come.' How right he was. During the gruelling experience of solitary confinement I have since discovered so many truths! I've had enough time to play back in my mind the tape recording of our strange life in this most historical period one has ever lived.

On our twelfth wedding anniversary¹⁹⁶ I lay on my back gasping for breath with a temperature of 103. I did not fail however to go through the ceremony twelve years ago when a trembling little girl of 23¹⁹⁷ stood next to you in a shabby little back veld church in Pondoland and said, 'I do'. I often wonder if your memory of me isn't that of that little girl. I recalled with all emotions and affection your reassuring and firm grip as you slipped the ring on my finger. It was not to you only that I said, 'I do'. I[t] was to you and all what you stand

195. Brother.

196. 14 June 1969.

197. Winnie Mandela's official date of birth is 26 September 1936 which would make her 21 at the time she was married, but it is a guesstimate as she is not sure of her exact date of birth.

for. The one without the other would have been incomplete for me. The huge congregation sang an unusual hymn for a wedding. 'Lizalise idinga lakho ... Zonk'itlanga zonkiziwe, Ma zizuze usindiso ... Ngeziphithi-phithi zethu, yonakhele imihlaba.'¹⁹⁸

The hymn was composed and sung by Rev Tiyo Soga the day he landed where you are in Cape Town on his return upon the failure of their mission abroad in the delegation that went to make representations for a better deal for the African in the Union Constitution of 1910 to the head office of the colonial settler government. Until then he had not realised how beautiful his country was and he sang praises on the spot. After the wedding, the wedding guests were rounded up and questioned. In the words of my late grandfather, 'Has the time come when the white man must determine who our children should marry and where?' The events looked unimportant, yet whether we are allowed to speak the truth or not, one single spark will always start a prairie fire. It was not long before my place of birth was on fire! It is still under Proclamation 400 to this day.¹⁹⁹

We were hardly a year together when history deprived me of you. I was forced to mature on my own. Your formidable shadow which eclipsed me left me naked and exposed to the bitter world of a young 'political widow'. I knew this was a crown of thorns for me but I also knew I said, 'I Do' for better or worse. In marrying you I was marrying the struggle of my people. Yes, the thorns sometimes pricked so hard that the blood from the wounds covered up my eyes and the excruciating pains blinded me for a while. Although I staggered across the path of freedom with pain, I staggered forward and never doubted my goal even when the crown was nailed by my people at times, this was only history. I would not have been worthy of their great love without such. When the tortuous minutes, hours, months dragged by gnawing at the inner cores of my soul I remembered that 'an army of principles will penetrate where an army of soldiers will not'. I also realised that honour and conviction are more binding than any oath. I also learnt that 'Even gold pass[ed] through the assayer's fire, and more precious than perishable gold is faith that has stood the test'. So much for that strange life of ours my love!

Uncle Marsh has been battling to see you since my detention. Unfortunately his applications do not receive the first consideration. There are urgent family matters which he has to discuss with you. It seems we need your co-operation now. Would you kindly advise whoever is concerned that you request Uncle

198. Fulfil your promise ... Let all the nations of the world, Receive salvation ... Behold our nation, And forgive its misdeeds.

199. Similar to the Terrorism Act, Proclamation 400 was used to proclaim emergency regulations and detain people without trial. It was introduced in 1960 and used by the Matanzima regime in Transkei.

Marsh to be the next to see you. I understand there is quite a long queue at the moment. The girls did not come home even during these last holidays but they are fortunately on his passport now and he is visiting them next weekend. I must say I am terribly disturbed by this, they are too young to be torn away from the security of a family. It was enough of a hardship to bring them up without you. Everytime I imagine how they must be feeling without both of us I get a relapse. One of those blows I referred to in my last letter.

All the Waterford documents are with Mr Carlson whom you also know has been battling to see you. I understand [he] and you had a lengthy discussion with Brig Aucamp on this matter. I have every confidence in Mr Brown whom I met during the case I had in 1967. It seems to me there will be quite a few problems we have at home. All the people he has to deal with are in Johannesburg. I quite agree with you that we should include Uncle Marsh amongst the guardians for the children and of course they will all act jointly with Uncle Allan Nxumalo who has been absolutely wonderful to them. They spent their last holidays with him again, he fetched them from the school once more. By the way he is still Minister of Health. Won't you ask for a special permission to write and thank him? One feels so small when so much is done without a word from the parents.

I was shocked to learn Kgatho has not gone to Fort Hare nor is he working. It also seems the family problems that have since arisen have no immediate solution. I find this subject disturbing and have suggested that it be left to you and Marsh to discuss urgently. The situation is getting out of control when one needs the clarity of mind to concentrate on the case. You know how much is involved in preparing for a mass trial and the amount of responsibility on my shoulders at the moment. There are certain feelings during such times which perhaps only you and I know but cannot put in words, suffice to say one cannot help but simply express them as the bitter sweetness of unjust suffering.

That reminds me once more of your remark upon 'the flow of the pen' and the 10th of March. But what you said about the wish that we were born the same hour! It's the other way around my love otherwise there wouldn't have been such a bitter struggle for filling up the gap. I am aware that my own infinitesimal contribution to the cause of my people will perhaps be worth one incomplete sentence in the books of the history of our country but even that is enough for me so long as it shall not be washed down the gutter of time. I know that when I get what I am fighting for I will get it forever and those who cling desperately to it swimming against the tide, fear losing it forever. I am lucky for I have seen the dawn of the day Rev T Soga serenaded. No amount of brutality meted out to me and my people will change the course of history.

There were times when I missed you so much during the presentation of our case last time. I remembered when you once roared at me 'Zami you are undisciplined'. Someone in the defence team used the same words when we were arguing over a certain point ... The same person said when I submitted my notes the following day over the same argument, 'you have definitely take a wrong profession, the pen is your profession even if I don't agree with you.' I laughed when Mr Bizos shook his head saying, 'She is an amazing character'.

When you get the childrens' school reports please study them with a view to assisting them with the choice of their subjects. Kgatho and Maki struggled so much because we did not do so on time. Zeni wants to be [a] doctor and Zindzi wants to be a teacher. Zeni is quiet, spotlessly clean, stands for hours in front of the mirror to make sure she is well-dressed, fond of cooking, sewing and very choosy about friends. She has stuck to Nombeko whom she befriended during their babyhood. Zindzi will have not less than twenty friends in our small yard, she conducts a holiday school, pugnacious, an embarrassing extrovert with ready-made views at the age of nine. 'Mummy do you know children have brains too? When I say I do not want a thing, I do not want it, stop putting cabbage in my food.'

On the night of 11th May 1969 when we were eating supper five days after their return from school she burst out at table, 'I want my Daddy' and she cried herself to sleep, little knowing that was my goodbye to them, that the outburst was an omen in fact. It was a well chosen period to break down a mother of young children!

(I think you should study their reports and Waterford prospectus jointly to assist in the choice of subjects.)

I was so happy to learn you have renewed your application to see me. I really cannot understand why there is so much harshness. I do agree that the Commissioner has honestly been rather hard on us. I have not seen you since the 21st of December 1968, what more would one want from us when we are now both prisoners?

There is complete chaos over our home at the moment, only Kgatho and Nomfundo are there, a very unsatisfying arrangement. As long ago as November last year a couple was put on the permit by Niki with the assistance of the Ngakanes²⁰⁰ who are related to it. I approached one of the couple, I know them very well too. I did so to enable Kgatho to proceed to university without any difficulty. On several occasions when the couple tried to move in there were difficulties deliberately created. I am surprised that Kgatho raised

200. Neighbours.

the problem with you early this year, he is aware of all the details. However we have decided that the matter must have full understanding on all parties concerned, this must be discussed urgently by you and Marsh before you even instruct on this. I am very grateful to Nkosazana Telia who has also tried her best to settle this.

Yes my love at the moment there is nothing we can do but swallow the cup of bitterness but one day we shall swallow it no more and that is the day whose dawn I have seen. One day we shall have a normal family unit too for no man with any manhood in himself can lead a normal life in an abnormal society. In the words of the late Luther King 'it is no better to be maladjusted in a maladjusted society'. He goes on to say 'the American negro is tired of being told to keep cool for he knows you can keep so cool in the long run you end up in the deep freeze'.

Darling, lots of love and a million kisses with sixteen million salutes to you.

Forever yours,
Nobandla