

The following is a letter I received from Nelson Mandela after visiting him in prison:

25 February, 1987

My dear Rrakgadi,

You have no idea what your visit to Pollsmoor has meant to all of us here. A visitor to a prisoner always has a significance difficult to put in words. Routine is the supreme law in almost every country in the world, and every day is for all practical purposes like the day before; the same surroundings, same faces, same dialogue, same odours, walls rising to the skies, and the ever present feeling that outside the prison gates there is an exciting world to which you have no access. A visit from your beloved ones, from friends, and even from strangers, is always an unforgettable occasion, when that frustrating monotony is broken and the entire world is literally ushered into the cell. Your visit was typical, and it made one feel that, after all, one is still part of the world to which we were born and grew up. It lighted a corner in me and a whole panorama of pleasant memories, going back as far back as 1939, flashed across the mind. Under different conditions we would have urged you to visit Robben Island, Pretoria, Diepkloof and Kroonstad to take to the others directly the same sentiments you expressed to me. But of course that is not possible.

It pleased us to learn that Bakwe's son Kgosi, together with JJ & Co, visited Botswana and also came to see you. That is a field to which a Matthews should be active, and we are happy indeed to

know that Kgosi is keeping the family tradition alive. I hope he has inherited Bakwe's excellent gift of wide and disciplined reading. During the Treason Trial, Bakwe had a set pattern from which he rarely deviated. On returning from the case he would chat with the family for some time, have supper, retire to the bedroom and get stuck to his reading for hours on end. Equally important was the fact that he knew how to absorb what he read and apply it to his political work. I have missed him and Fiki over the years.

As far as the other grandchildren are concerned you are mistaken to think that talking about them may bore me. On the contrary, the progress made by children can be very fascinating even when they are your grandchildren. Admittedly, having regard to your family background, there is nothing particularly astonishing in your grandchildren reaching out for the stars. The very achievements of their parents and grandparents are in themselves a challenge and inspiration. But even when making allowance for that, what they have achieved gives a person in prison a fairly clear picture of the far-reaching changes which are taking place in Southern Africa today, and put the social turmoil in this region in perspective.

It would seem that some kind of diaspora is in full swing and children from urban townships and simple country villages alike are scattered all over the world and, in the process, horizons are widened beyond recognition, and new ideas acquired; with this background they return home to an environment not yet ready to accommodate them. This phenomenon is evident in many of the letters we received and I am happy to note that your grandchildren are right in the centre of this process. I congratulate all of them and send them my fondest regards and best wishes.

I see Walter and others now and again, and we had a pleasant get together on Boxing Day. We are like a family and share almost everything we have. Naturally, we miss you all and literally crave for the open veldt, some fresh air and plenty of sunshine.

Much love Rrakgadi,

very sincerely
Nelson