

EXCLUSIVE!!!!

**One Of The Most Moving
Stories Of Our Times**

The Love Letters Of NELSON MANDELA

ONE of the most moving documents of our times is the collection of love letters that Nelson Mandela wrote to his wife, Winnie, during the 27 years he was imprisoned in South Africa. Tender, yearning, eloquent, these letters express the human side of the brilliant politician we featured in May, and should be read along with his political statements demanding an immediate end to the apartheid system. Some of Mandela's colleagues asked him to delete these

By Fatima Meer*



THE Robben Island prisoners settled down to the mindless timetable of imprisonment, filling hours with manual labour which mercifully distracted them from dwelling on their plight and aching for the social contact they had lost. The letters and visits, twice a year, and then gradually more (by 1981 two letters and two visits a month) became their lifeline. Every word transmitted through the glass panes and written on ruled foolscap was carefully censored. They learned to write closely . . . and they, and the recipients of their communications, learned the art of double meaning.

Letters did not always reach their destination; visits could not always be taken because of travelling distance and financial problems. In [Winnie Mandela's] case visits were hindered by her banning, her movements controlled by the state, or because she too was imprisoned.

Throughout these long years of separation, the separated grew closer. There was no dimming in the relationship which withstood malicious gossip and every kind of state persecution. The love-making continued at a distance, and always in the presence of strangers; the love talk contained its privacy in signs and gestures.

Throughout the years, Winnie made every visit an event for him to remember and relish, presenting herself with meticulous care, in toiletry, jewellery, and in the dress or kaftan chosen for the occasion.

And each visit was celebrated in the letters that followed.

The waiting for letters and visits, the joy of expectations fulfilled, the de-

letters from his authorized biography, but he refused, saying in effect that a revolutionary is, among other things, a father and a husband and that revolutionaries fight, among other things, for the right to love and to make music and poetry. It was, in fact, this love, stronger than iron bars, that helped him endure, and the letters introduce us to one of the great couples of the century and one of the great love stories of all times.

spondency following disappointment, the letter-counting, letter- and visit-treasuring, are expressed in the following extracts from Nelson's letters to Winnie.

TO WINNIE:

I have been fairly successful in putting on a mask behind which I have pined for the family, alone, never rushing for the post when it comes until somebody calls out my name. I also never linger after visits although sometimes the urge to do so becomes quite terrible. I am struggling to suppress my emotions as I write this letter.

I have received only one letter since you were detained, that one dated 22 August. I do not know anything about family affairs, such as payment of rent, telephone bills, care of children and their expenses, whether you will get a job when released. As long as I don't hear from you, I will remain worried and dry like a desert.

I recall the Karoo I crossed on several occasions. I saw the desert again in Botswana on my way to and from Africa—endless pits of sand and not a drop of water. I have not had a letter from you. I feel dry like a desert.

Letters from you and the family are like the arrival of summer rains and spring that liven my life and make it enjoyable.

Whenever I write you, I feel that inside physical warmth, that makes me forget all my problems. I become full of love.

26 October 1976

Had it not been for your visits, wonderful letters and your love, I would have fallen apart many years ago. I



United in love and struggle, the Mandelas rub noses (opposite page) during early part of marriage and hold hands (above) as they greet thousands celebrating his release after 27 years of imprisonment. They married in 1958, and Mandela was arrested in August 1962, some 17 months after going underground.

pause here and drink some coffee, after which I dust the photos on my bookcase. I start with that of Zeni, which is on the outer side, then Zindzi's and lastly yours, my darling Mum. Doing so always eases the longing for you.

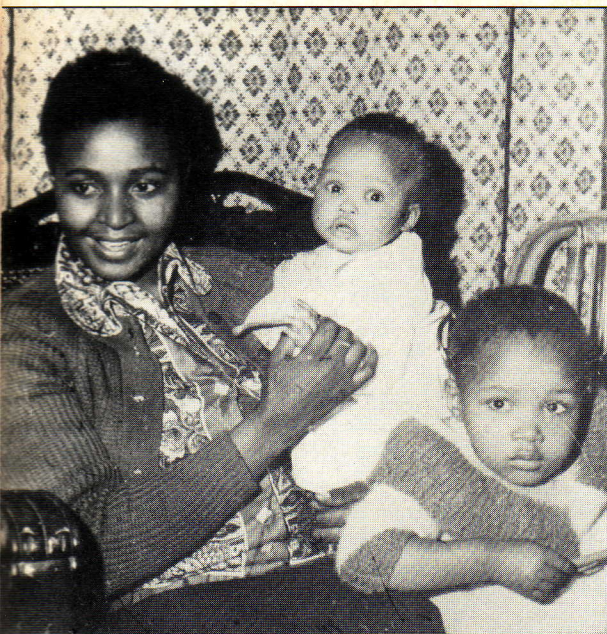
6 May 1979

Your beautiful photo still stands about two feet above my left shoulder as I write this note. I dust it carefully

every morning, for to do so gives me the pleasant feeling that I'm caressing you as in the old days. I even touch your nose with mine to recapture that electric current that used to flush through my blood whenever I did so. Nolitha stands on the table directly opposite me. How can my spirits ever be down when I enjoy the fond attention of such wonderful ladies?

15 April 1976

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After imprisonment of her husband, Winnie Mandela raised their two children, Zindziswa and Zenani. With Zenani Dlamini and Zindziswa she arrived (right) at Cape Town to visit Nelson Mandela in prison. Nelson Mandela is reunited (below) with wife, daughter Zindziswa and granddaughter.



MANDELA LETTERS *Continued*

You looked really wonderful on 17/11, very much like the woman I married. There was colour in your face. Gone was the choleric appearance and glazed look in your eyes when you are under pressure of over-dieting. As usual I kept addressing you as Mum but my body kept telling me that a woman is sitting across this platform. I felt like singing, even if just to say Hal-lelujah!

22 November 1979

You looked really sparkingly attractive in your outfit during your last visit, especially on Sunday. There was hardly any evidence that Zeni and Zindzi sucked away your youth and part of your physical beauty.

31 March 1983

Your visit last month was quite unexpected and that may be one reason why I enjoyed it so much. At my age I would have expected all the urges of youth to have faded away. But it does not appear to be so. The mere sight of you, even the thought about you, kindles a thousand fires in me.

Though cheerful on 19/2, you nonetheless looked a bit ill and the tiny pools of water in your eyes drowned the love and tenderness they always radiate. But the knowledge of what I have enjoyed in the last twenty years made me feel that love even though physically denied by illness.

On 29/10 you were even more queenly

and desirable in your deep green dress and I thought you were lucky that I could neither reach nor confide to you how I felt. Sometimes I feel like one who is on the sidelines, who has missed life itself.

Travelling with you to work in the morning, phoning you during the day, touching your hand or hugging you as you moved up and down the house, enjoying your delicious dishes, the unforgettable hours in the bedroom, made life taste like honey. These are things I cannot forget.

21 January 1979

I love you all the time, in the miserable and cold winter days and when all the beauty, sunshine and warmth of summer returns. My joy when you're bursting with laughter is beyond measure. This is how I always think of you—our Mum with plenty to keep her occupied; with a smiling face whatever the circumstances.

10 February 1980

On 30/8 I was hardly out of the visiting rooms and I thought of you as I walked back to the cell. I said to myself, there goes Msuthu like a bird in hand returning to the bush, to the wild jungle and the wide world. I miss you, Mhlophe, and love you! Devotedly, Dalibunga.

1 October 1975

These days I spend some time thinking of you both as Dadewethu, Mum, pal and mentor. What you perhaps don't

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MANDELA LETTERS Continued

know is how often I think and actually picture in my mind all that makes you up physically and spiritually—the shape of your forehead, shoulders, limbs, the loving remarks which come daily and the blind eye you've always turned against those numerous shortcomings that would have frustrated another woman.

Sometimes it is a wonderful experience to sit alone and think back about previous moments spent with you, darling. I even remember a day when you were bulging with Zindzi, struggling to cut your nails. I now recall this with a sense of shame. I could have done it for you. Whether or not I was conscious of it, my attitude was: I've done my duty, a second brat is on the way, the difficulties that you're now facing as a result of your physical conditions are now all yours.

15 April 1976

Your love and devotion has created a debt which I will never attempt to pay back. So enormous is it that even if I had to pay regular instalments for another century I would not settle it. All I can say Mum is Nangamsol!

21 July 1979

The tenderness and intimacy which exists between a man and his Mum, Dad, and the special friend that you are. This particular relationship carries with it something that cannot be separated from self.

21 January 1979

Your affectionate letters, Xmas, birthday and wedding anniversary messages always arrive at the right moment, leaving me with the hope of getting an equally stimulating letter the following month. Hearing from the same person every week for fourteen years should have created that familiarity which takes away the freshness and joy of novelty. But I light up immediately your letter comes and I feel like flying where eagles cannot reach. Although I know your ability to put things simply and clearly I was at once attracted by the beautiful way in which you summed up our eighteen years together—eighteen years of the greatest horror in your life. That message, as usual, shocked and thrilled me all at once.

19 July 1976

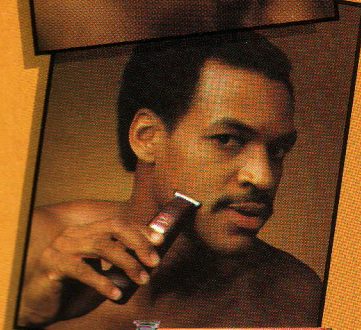
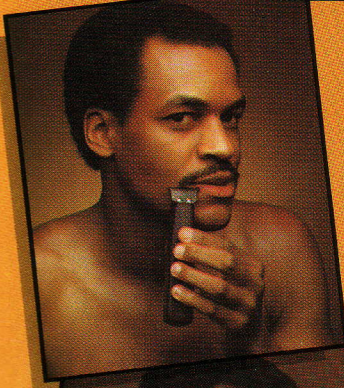
In times like these I miss you more than ever before. I have told you many times

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before about the simple things in life that I have missed most these last sixteen years: with you in Jeppe, Chancellor, boxing tournaments, music festivals, film shows, at Nqonqi's in the open veld, the unforgettable days at 8115 and the greatest of all moments—closing the bedroom door.

19 November 1979

Your letters are more than a tonic and I feel different every time I hear from you even when you don the mantle of Nogqwashu and sting me from every direction. Such stings have come to be part of our life, our mutual love and our happiness. They give me some idea of the ravages and damage caused on us by the life of hardship that we must live. On such occasions I always concentrate on the salutation or on the very last words in the concluding paragraph.

31 March 1983

I remember 14 June [the Mandelas' wedding day] nostalgically. In spite of the difficult times, we went to the altar. The treason trial, confined to Johannesburg, the debts that were piling up, the inability to honour obligations, on occasions remaining in the background when she had every right to share the limelight: all these things shock me as nothing else has ever done before. That was our cross which I hope we carried reasonably well. I spent a lot of time on this day thinking of you. Every time I do, I literally glow and long to embrace you and feel the electric shocks that your flesh rubs onto me, your navel and heartbeat. Three years from now we celebrate our Silver Jubilee—where and how? Till we meet again.

29 June 1980

Dear Sister, Today we have been to-



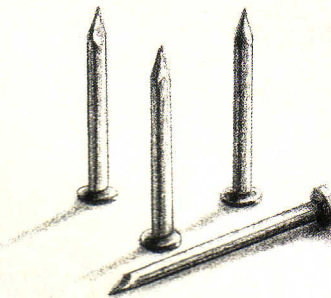
In Soweto home, militant wife and companion of Nelson Mandela screens a call. She says that being reunited with her husband is "a renewal of [their] marriage and the struggle for my people."

gether for nineteen years. Many things have happened in that time. C.K. Nozipho, Phyllis, Tshawuza Ntwasa and Makhulu who were at our wedding are all gone. So is Ma who welcomed you as a bride to our new home and Thembi, whom you loved as your own child. May they all rest in peace. . . .

1 October 1975

I wish I could drive you on a long, long journey just as I did on 12/6/58, with the one difference that this time I'd prefer us to be alone. I've been away from you for so long that the very first thing I would like to do on my return would be to take you away from that suffocating atmosphere, drive you along carefully, so that you could have the opportunity of breathing fresh and clean air, seeing the beauty spots of South Africa, its green grass and trees, colourful wild flowers, sparkling streams, animals grazing in the open veld and be able to talk to the simple people we meet along the road. Our first stop would be to the place where Ma Rhadebe and CK [Winnie's parents] sleep. I hope they lie next to each other. Then I would be able to pay my respect to those who have made it possible for me to be as happy and free as I am now. Perhaps the stories I've so much wanted to tell you all these years would begin there. The atmosphere should probably sharpen your ears and restrain me to concentrate on those aspects which are tasty, edifying and constructive. Thereafter, we would adjourn and resume next to Mphakanyiswa and Nosekeni [Nelson's parents] where the environment would be similar. I believe we would then be fresh and solid as we drive back to 8115.

29 June 1976



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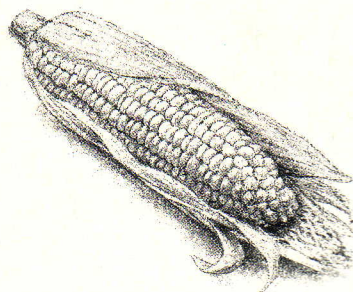
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RELIEF FOR CORNS

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