

A Letter from Africa

March 2016

I must start with the big news.

We have decided to leave Africa and return to the UK!!

I will get to this topic shortly but first some of the things that have happened since I last wrote.



Xmas, of course, has come and gone and the usual picture of us by the tree tells the story of a house that has only 3 occupiers (if you include Zazu).

Our local Newspaper, The Herald, had a competition to find the best 5, **very short stories**, being limited to 100 words. There were over 200 entries and my offering of a Karoo Landing was one of the lucky winners. Apart from the “glory” of being a “published writer” it did come with about 10 books as a prize.



It appeared in the Dec 24 edition and thus made for Xmas Day reading. Well, I read it so that is at least one! It was supported by a pleasant artist impression of the story line.

In fact I was also a winner 2 years ago when the top 10 were chosen but this time round it was about the top 5.

The Herald is one of South Africa's oldest newspapers being founded in 1845 and has today some 256000 readers.

The Post Office here in South Africa have committed suicide by going on strike for around 5 months last year. This action came on top of a reputation for delays and lost goods. The spin off affects are multiple, with dwindling business as companies take to the electronic means of communication. Greetings cards and parcels are no longer sent to the same degree and thus the sales of these items must have suffered.

The Post Office is bankrupt and survives, like so many other Government entities, on tax payer bail outs. In desperation they have put a new CEO in place who comes from a successful time in private business. He hopes to return the operation to some kind of financial balance in a few years' time. It will be a tall ask to turn this thing around with unpopular decisions perhaps not pleasing the ANC and thus potentially shortening his reign. But let us see how he gets on.

Caught up in all of this was some Xmas post that arrived in Feb, which was a month earlier than Xmas 2015. We sent many cards to the UK with Courtney from where they were posted but others missed out this year due to postal uncertainty.



It is strange how the passing years modify the Xmas gift list, and so here I am standing proudly in my new Wellington boots next to a cover for the braai. Zazu, as ever, is close at hand.



Bev had a big event of her own in February and this pic shows her in high care at St. George's Hospital after a **knee replacement**. It had been a problem for some years and finally the surgeon was happy to perform the operation. She is progressing very well despite it being only 3 weeks since the op. After the decision was taken to go ahead it took only one week for hospitalisation and completion. The surgeon states that no plane journeys should be undertaken for 6 months and this impacts our plans going forward.



It has been a hot summer with virtually no rain. To illustrate the high temps, I have included a picture of 2 very tall candles that we started to use when there was no electricity. We have had 6 months with power and thus the candles were placed outside under the cover of the eaves and in the shade. You will see that these very large candles were no match for the high twenties and early thirty levels that we have experienced.

On a serious note **the draught** has been broken in some areas although we wait to see the impact on dams and farming. The devastation done to crops will be felt throughout 2016 as millions of tons of maize will be imported at higher Rand prices that will form part of the heavy food price increases expected from meat, milk and cereals.

With the sun shining and balmy, wind free evenings, we played host to some friends for **sundowner drinks**. Many took up the hammer and 5 cent coins to "sign in" along the "Walk on the Wild side" section of our garden.





We have operated a monthly lunch/breakfast meet up with 6 others and for ease of reference we refer to the group as **MADk**. This being some key initials of 4 of us. It was Di's turn to select the venue and she chose lunch at the Algoa Bay Yacht Club restaurant.

Seen here from left are Trudi, Bev, Val, Di, Mary, Ken, me and Mike.

Di tells me that we have now met in this fashion on 34 different occasions! It started in 2013 and the objective was to maintain social contact by at least gathering each month at different value for money establishments. The methodology has meant that we have been to a diverse range of places. Most have been success stories and even the disappointing ones represent an experience.



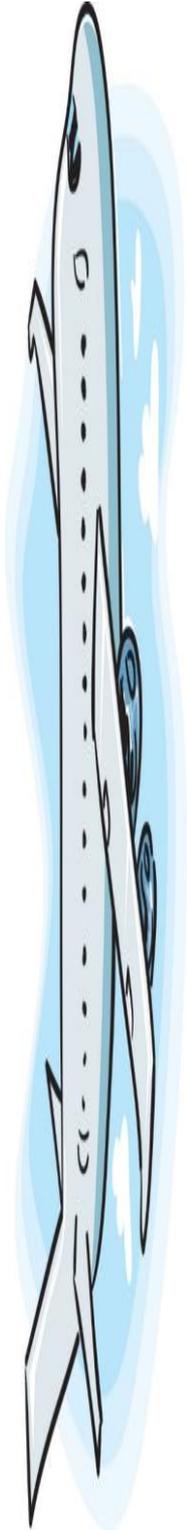
I include an earlier picture as a comparison and I think we hold up pretty well.

This is **Zazu** who is back to his usual self after being quite unwell.

I mention him particularly as he will be in need of a new home. He is now 12 years old and was Courtney's dog as a puppy.

We have a difficult decision to make and really hope that this gentle old timer will soon find a new family to be part of.





I have left the main, and stop press, story to last, because it covers many things from politics, the economy to family and life style.

We were transferred to South Africa in Jan 1973 and have spent decades enjoying a wonderful country. We have seen history in the making as 1994 saw the arrival of democracy and the Rainbow Nation. We were on course for harmonious growth, with improvement in the lives of all people using the huge wealth of natural resources from minerals, farming and tourism.

We started well as Nelson Mandela lead us out of Apartheid in a peaceful manner. Thabo Mbeki brought order, administration and intellect into play with our balance of payments showing a surplus and good GDP numbers.

South Africa was the envy of many nations.

But then the politicians got greedy for wealth and power. The latest ANC government headed by Jacob Zuma has seen all this glorious future thrown away under a pile of dirty dealings, corruption, incompetence and nepotism.

Our GDP growth rate will be about 0.5% this year when 5+% is needed to create jobs. The unemployed now totals more than 8million and we have a youth that is made up of millions of disillusioned people who see no hope of better times.

The country is on the edge of being downgraded to junk status and the Government debt expands with each new unobtainable promise and round of corruption. State owned enterprises are bankrupt e.g. SAA, Eskom, GPO and with the exception of SARS they all underperform in a shocking manner.

Local government is dysfunctional and service delivery protests occur on a daily basis across the country. Zuma and his pals are ridiculed and shamed each day by the media and the courts are called into play to stop them from ignoring the constitution and court orders. The shining lights are the independent judicial system plus the Chapter 9 institutions like the Public Protector who has held fast to her role despite the attacks levelled at her by the ANC hierarchy.

It is a disgraceful picture that has forced people to seek work outside SA and particularly away from our struggling province, the Eastern Cape. Business does not invest due to an uncertain future as the ANC bounce from one disaster to another.

It is no wonder that the youth seek their future elsewhere and so it comes as no surprise that our family is now all in the UK.

Of course it is all very sad.

We have seen the demise of Zimbabwe and thus the tell-tale signs are all around us to indicate where we are headed. Having said that, it is still not too late, as a few good men and women of integrity, vision and intellect and of any colour, can turn it all around .It will take years to correct the damage done but we only need to be seen to be headed in the right direction for people and the world to have hope and optimism in our future.

Sadly the masses of people seem unable or unwilling to vote in these people and it is difficult to see how much lower we will have to dive before a turnaround might start .At our age we no longer have the advantage of being able to see it through.

And so we have taken the very difficult decision to follow family and give up our great lifestyle and friends in South Africa and head back to a UK wrestling with the pains of cultural integration and a Europe in some disarray. We have been spoilt with two company transfers and promotion. But this move is quite different!

There is so much to do.

Our timeframe expectations were thrown into disarray as the house sold in one day without any advertising. A down payment was given on the car but with ownership happening at the last moment of our time in PE. The uncertainty about the Rand and exchange control legislation has meant that we have decided to liquidate as much of our retirement investments as we can.

Visits to SARS for tax clearance etc. bank, and foreign exchange desks have taken up days of discussion as we wade through the red tape to free up assets.

The demise of the Rand has meant that our wealth, when given in GB Pounds, has been destroyed but we are happy to give up these physical things and replace them with people and experiences. Our house here in Port Elizabeth is described by UK visitors as a million pound house (exaggeration) but will buy virtually nothing in the UK. With high shipping costs it is impractical for us to take our furniture and thus we have been caught up in a month of selling things. Visits to boot sales and setting up book sales occupy our time. I have learnt to use Gumtree and we are busy opening old boxes and sorting out what might be shipped and thus what can be sold.

If all goes to plan, and it should, then we will vacate PE at the end of May. Because of the flying restriction placed on Bev, we will take a coach to Cape Town and stay for a few days with Brian and Helen and Mike and Jenny. Of course we will not have a car at this time and what is left of our worldly goods will be en route by some slow boat that awaits consolidation of other smaller lots of cargo.



We will be in England by the end of June and then we need to get really serious about where and how to stay, plus speedy selection of a s/h car. Initially we are invited to stay with Melanie and family in Yorkshire with a longer term joint effort with Andrea and Courtney envisaged in the south, with an 18 month stay at least in the Chislehurst area.

In the mean time we have lots of policies and subscriptions to cancel in South Africa from medical to armed response and other insurance products.

This picture shows us trying to sell some 500 books that have been carefully sourced and held over a period of years. That will leave perhaps 200 to take to England (where will they go?)

Our time here will be taken up with all the complex and time consuming actions of selling up and no doubt the next 2 months will dash by.

I would think there is time for one last "Letter from Africa" before we reopen with "A Letter from a Small Island" or some such title. In fact suggestions would be welcomed.

One last comment relates to Facebook.

We are aware that some of you actively use Facebook and although we do not, we do read and take note of the things you all say. We know of the new babies, the travels that you make and places visited. We know about events like dog shows and scenes of snow or old historical places.

I use this letter to tell you our news and the Blog to save videos. Our silence does not mean we do not read or care.

That is quite a lot for one letter and I am sorry for the number of words that probably outlast your staying power.

So it is another good bye from me and farewell from Bev.

Love and best regards to you all.

Alan and Bev

