

A letter from Africa July 2 2013

We are still here and writing.

A little bit more frequently of late as subject matters seem to pop up and invite comment.

I am, by nature, hopeful.

It is after all, I suppose, one of those essential feelings that Homo sapiens need to have if mankind is to continue to flourish and to seek out whatever it is we each want to find either as individuals or as a species.

I am the naive believer in good over evil and that honesty and truth will triumph over lies and deceit. I am like putty, in the hands of the great film producers who depict the wonderful and heroic stories of endeavour, valour, love and courage that win through when all seems lost.

It would also be true to say that younger people have a bigger dollop of hope in their mental make up. They see the future with clear eyes and the belief that all will be well. This belief, perhaps, flows from the perceived knowledge that they will be the ones to make the changes needed for a better life for all.

Whilst there is life there is hope or should we say without hope there is no life? *(Hey, this is all a bit deep. Just tell us what is going on in SA)*

It is very easy to find bad news about SA and probably lots of other places. In Australia a documentary showed a picture of poor white people living in dreadful conditions and from deep dark Dorset came the feeling that life in SA seemed very dangerous.

Both may be correct but perhaps a brief picture of our day here will provide some reasons on why we all cling to the hope that SA will turn around and be a nation that all will view with pride.



We have one of the smallest houses in our suburb which has a charming cottage feel. The gardens, however, are quite large at some 1600m².

The pool plays a central theme in gatherings, sunbathing and general entertaining around the main braai area. The patio is the place for sunny days out of the wind and for the smaller braais.

This is me on the patio a few days ago in winter! The other is a summer shot of visiting UK family having a good lunch on our much used patio.



Fancy some wildlife and scenery? Well let me show you some.



We have near us the Addo Elephant National Park that now features the Big 5 including this early morning Lion out on the prowl. Bev is seen in the other shot with the dramatic Drakensberg Mountains in the background. And then there is the coastline, and this old family pic shows us at the local Sardinia Bay beach.



And here we have a picture of friends journeying into the wonderful semi desert of the Karoo.



I could carry on and on in this vein but apart from the latest picture of me, the rest are all shots that you would have seen before. But together they capture a feeling of one side of life in SA. I guess that many people from around the world would happily swap their existing lifestyle for this one.

So that answers part of the question of why we are still here. The other aspect of the question deals with those day to day matters of safety, health, transport and education that I moan about all the time.

The solutions for the moment lie in private services that replace or supplement those that the Government attempt to offer.

Let us look at security.

Many people subscribe to armed response units that patrol the suburb and come running to your property if the alarm system is activated. We have more people employed with these security companies e.g. ADT etc, than there are members of the SA Police Force.

Next up is health.

People who can afford it join a private health care scheme (insurance) and are thus able to access world class medical care whether via private hospitals, specialists or GP`s. (In my case 2 hip replacements with no waiting).

Transport services.



We need to own good cars that are reliable and fuel efficient and able to cover large distances. We are down to one car now but when working we would have had two.

This is our current baby, a C180, seen as we drove over the Swartberg Pass. It is 125000 km`s. old but hopefully will keep going for some time.

Education

With Courtney now in Grade 6 we follow the education scene quite closely. It was necessary for Andrea to get her into a pre-primary school that was a feeder to one of the old model C schools. These are public schools that have managed to retain their excellent quality since 1994. They do this by hiring the right people and providing good facilities both in class and on the sports fields. This is achieved via the fees that they charge which are necessary to supplement the Government subsidy. If you can afford this then the education received is world class both in terms of subject matter and the intangibles of manners, etiquette and respect in a multi racial group of students.

It does not look so bad, does it?

If we think of leaving because of what the ANC is doing to this country then you must remember that we would be leaving all this behind.

Of course the above picture, whilst accurate for us, does come at a price. We see all these extra costs as double taxation as we have already paid for the services but the ANC Government has just not delivered. These charges rise annually and place big pressure on the budget of pensioners.

And then we have the financial trap.

Our start up 3 bed semi in England needed to be some 100kms from London to which we commuted. Our house in SA would now not buy half of this and perhaps we could now only afford a 1/2 bed roomed flat somewhere. This is not due to property values but the depreciation of the Rand: £. This has moved from around £1:R2 in 1973 to now stand at some £1:R15!

Add to this that our private retirement funds would receive the same conversion at R15 to 1.

So each day I watch the media and wait for those signs of change. A U turn by the ANC or a new party or leader. If not this, then the danger is that it may be an uprising along Egyptian lines when the masses say "enough- no more".

We have just had a visit from Obama.

I must start by saying that I am an Obama fan. My support comes from what he says and the way he says it. I believe him (*but he is a politician-how can you believe him?*).

I watched his speech at the University of Cape Town which I found stirring and motivating. He cleverly used the ills of "others" to avoid embarrassing those of his ANC hosts. The audience were not confused and responded accordingly.

It may well be that the USA just wants to counter Chinese approaches but I still like him.

Other bits

- More initiation deaths (now 16 in the Eastern Cape) and the schools are still open and no one seems to have been arrested or taken responsibility.
- Wage increase time-again. AMCU who are now big in the Platinum belt have asked for an increase of 100%.
- TOLL fees in Jhb still on hold with protests ongoing.
- Big squabble over the resting place for Nelson Mandela as family jostle for prime positions that may well include the reburial of his children back to Qunu.
- The Nkandla affair report is now considered as Top Secret despite tax payers having seemingly coughed up around R206 million for additions to Zuma`s private residence. We await Public Protector Madonsela`s unbiased report in due course.
- The Marikana enquiry is still on the go and no arrests or disciplinary action or even responsibility has been displayed by the police following the death of 34 miners last year.
- We await the decision by the UK court on Dewani as he needs to stand trial for the murder of his wife in SA. Enough delay-no more.



And as I finish this note I add one last picture, being that of the 19th hole at Walmer Golf Course in which our 4 ball watch over national affairs as we sip a beer or two. Seen are from L to R , me, Stephen, Richard and Ron.

Ah, a tough life!

But one last bit of news covers the new Children`s Laureate Malorie Blackman ,third from left. Mackenzie is to her left and she was invited to London for the event in order to undertake an interview with her and others. Mackenzie and Melanie operate a blog called “We Sat Down” that reviews publications and especially children`s books and the invite flowed from this activity.



I am sorry that this stretched on a bit and tested your ability to read beyond the second page but there were pictures all along the way.

I must add that this view of our life in SA is accurate for us but it would be quite wrong of me not to highlight the plight of millions of very poor people in SA who suffer a lifetime of misery due in part to the shocking manner in which this Government treats them. My complaints are nothing compared to their hardships, but of course much of what I complain about is on their behalf and not ours. But if the majority are well cared for, then the nation will be a better place for all, including us. I want to be proud of the country I live in.
(Drum beat and toast to the future then?)

So it is again goodbye from me and goodbye from Bev.

I will shoot this off quickly as I think Nelson Mandela matters are fast approaching but on a lighter note Wimbledon and The Ashes series need to be watched.

Until the next time.

Love

Alan and Bev