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NOTES

Botswana's Sister-in-Law: The Letters of Muriel Sanderson, 1965-2002

*Edited by Modise Molaakgosi**



Muriel Sanderson (née Williams) is well known as the person who introduced her younger sister Ruth to Seretse Khama at Nutford House, London, in 1947. As you will see in the following letters, this famous encounter also led to Muriel's long relationship with the Khama family and Botswana.

Apart from her close friends, few will be aware of Muriel's own remarkable life, especially the one she led after joining the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation (MEF), in Kitwe, on the Zambian Copperbelt, in 1960. The MEF was founded in 1958 to promote African development at a time when many whites in Northern Rhodesia were resisting democracy and favouring the perpetuation of white rule under the Central African Federation. At MEF, African nationalists such as Kenneth Kaunda were taken seriously, supported in their efforts and placed in consultations with whites willing to sit round the table for negotiations. By the time independence came to Zambia in 1964, Muriel was a member of Kaunda's United National Independence Party (UNIP). In 1965 she became a Zambian citizen and was elected to the Kitwe City Council. The MEF ran courses of many types, and its Women's Centre became the seed-bed of the women's movement in the country. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Zambia was born at Mindolo, and Muriel served as its national treasurer for 37 years and represented the Zambia YWCA abroad. Muriel was a friend of President Kaunda and many cabinet ministers, national and local office holders. She was also a member of the congregational St. Margaret's Church (where she too was treasurer), a member of the United Church of Zambia, and through her church and MEF work a representative at meetings of the All African Council of Churches in Zambia and other countries in Africa.

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She served as MEF's Accountant from 1960 to 1976 and, after running a travel agency in Kitwe, returned to the MEF as Financial Controller from 1988 to 1995 (and as Acting Director 1991-1992). Bookish, widely read and travelled, with interests in film, tennis, international politics, theatre, gardening, and most of all, swimming, Muriel Sanderson retired in 1995 and relocated to Botswana to live near her sister, niece, nephews and great nephews. She continued to volunteer her accounting and other talents to the Methodist Church and other organisations in Gaborone, and was a life member of The Botswana Society. She remained a Zambian citizen.

Over the years Mrs Sanderson was a remarkable observer. Her correspondence, particularly her annual letters to keep her legion of friends informed of her activities, provides much information about the world of which she was a part and many insights into the persons who were shaping it. She writes fluidly, descriptively, with neat turns of phrase and humorous off-side comments. Mrs Sanderson visited Botswana often, and what follows are those portions of her writing that pertain to Botswana. She was a unique witness, because of her closeness to Ruth, Seretse and their family and her detachment from Botswana as a Zambian. Her letters begin on the eve of Botswana's independence. In 2015 Muriel passed away at the age of 94 and her remains were interred on Ruretse (Ruth-Seretse) farm to the north of Gaborone.

The originals and transcripts of Muriel's letters were preserved and made available by her friend from Zambia days, Dr P David Wilkin, who has published a complete collection of Muriel's letters, as well as many photographs and other mementos of her life.¹⁵

28 April 1965 Kitwe

This time I shall begin with Tuesday, March 2nd, a red-letter day in our family. Seretse's election results came through, and when I telephoned him at lunchtime, he already knew from the trend that he had won.¹⁶ He was actually invited to form a government in the evening. I rang again then to congratulate him, after I had been invited to speak on our local TV commenting on the result.

The same day, I was returned unopposed as a Kitwe Municipal Councillor. I was not sure whether I was eligible to stand, as I live outside the area, but as there had been no provision for changing the roll, I was OK. UNIP¹⁷ put up 2 European candidates here in Kitwe, and we both got in unopposed.... So UNIP now controls Kitwe, the second town being Lusaka.

The third thing connected with this date is my Zambian citizenship. It actually arrived in the post a few days later, but it is dated March 2nd -which seems quite a coincidence. On the strength of these 3 things, I threw a party to celebrate.

The week all this happened, I received a telegram from Seretse inviting me to attend his swearing-in ceremony at Gaborone as the new Prime Minister. As I read the cable, I thought how impossible it would be to attend. By the time I had driven the 4 miles home from choir I had talked myself into trying. It meant leaving just less than 48 hours later, by train, but my boss agreed I could take a week's leave, so off I went. Gaborone¹⁸ is further south than Serowe and means an extra 7 hours on the train (making 55) but I was saved a few hours of

¹⁵ See <https://davidwilkinwpzambia.com/muriel-williams-sanderson>

¹⁶In 1966 Seretse Khama (1921-1980) was elected Prime Minister in the Botswana's first National Assembly elections which led to 'self-rule' prior to formal independence on 30 September 1965, when he became Botswana's first president.

¹⁷ United National Independence Party, headed by Kenneth Kaunda. UNIP had governed Zambia (former Northern Rhodesia) since its independence from Great Britain in 1964.

¹⁸ For years after it was established in 1964 in anticipation of independence, Gaborone (lit. Gaborone's) often was used interchangeably with the proper Gaborone, and it also could be confused with the Bechuanaland Protectorate administrative station of Gaborone's not far from present-day Tlokweng and located in what became that part of the capital known as 'The Village'. Gaborone was the seemingly ageless *kgosi* of the Batlokwa, who reigned from 1880 to his death in 1932 at about 112 years of age.

this when Braim Nkonde turned up, visiting his Zambia Youth Service camps on the Copperbelt, so he drove me to Lusaka on his return, where I stayed the night, and got the train early next morning. The train from here to Lusaka takes 13 hours, a car takes 4-5. All the same, I did get fed up with that return train journey -out of my 8 days leave, 4 were spent in the train, which seems a rather high proportion!

I arrived at midnight, and Seretse was sworn in next morning (9th) at the house of the Resident Commissioner, Sir Peter Fawcus.¹⁹ It was a quiet little family affair, I was the only “foreign” visitor. There were speeches by Sir Peter, the senior chief, former leader of Legco,²⁰ and then Seretse. Champagne followed, and I met the rest of the Cabinet. It is small, 7 Ministers.... But they have a high standard of education by African standards – all have done 5 years secondary school, and that is rare. They have a terrible drought problem, for the 5th year running there have been practically no rains. Right this minute, Seretse is on a state visit here in Zambia, discussing economic and political matters, because he really has to get crisis methods going concerning the awful crop failures. To return to the ceremony, Ruth looked gorgeous as usual, in her favourite colour blue, she had a brocade dress and coat to match, and a very pretty feathery hat. I wore my silk dress bought for the Independence here.

Gaberones has to be seen to be believed. If you think of the old American film of opening up the West, you are getting warm. It is still being built, and when I was there in March, there were no street names, no numbers, precious few phones, electricity breakdowns every lunch-time and some evenings, and dust, dust everywhere. I went out with Seretse to try to find someone he wanted, and our only hope was to spot either this chap’s car outside the house (which he thought he would recognise), or his children! After several enquiries we finally found him, but what a game! Ruth and Seretse are living temporarily in a Minister’s house, waiting for their own to be finished. We went to see it, it will be double story but must be the most modest Prime Minister’s House in the world. It has 4 bedrooms, which they have now, and is one too few, with my mother living there, Ian and the twins have to share, which is rough on Ian. There is a guest wing, and a large lounge, dining room, kitchen. I am very bad at seeing a house from the bare bones, one thing they will have to work on is the garden. All of them there look so barren. I went shopping for Ruth one morning, to try to find bread and eggs. There are about 3 broken-down little stores, shacks really, and that is all. The post-office is one half of one of these, all that is missing is the post to tie the horse up to. I found the bread, but not the eggs. The ladies of the town had all flown to Mafeking, 180 miles away, to get their hair set for the big occasion. It will be most interesting to see this place develop. Each month a new government department is moving up from Mafeking.²¹

After two days in Gaberones, I flew with Ruth and the twins to Serowe to help her pack up some of their linen and clothes. We went in a small private plane, and flying over the Kalahari desert was most interesting. You could see the railway line stretching for miles and miles away into the distance, straight, with no vegetation to interrupt the view. It was rather bumpy and I was glad when we got to Serowe, but there a flock of goats decided to wander over the landing strip as we came in, so we had to circle round again until they had passed. Ruth and Seretse are keeping their Serowe house open, in fact they spent Easter there, but Ruth needed some of the things in Gaberones. We worked pretty hard, Ruth was pretty tired after all

¹⁹ Robert Peter Fawcus (1915-2003) served as Government Secretary (1954-1959), Resident Commissioner (1959-1963) and Queen’s Commissioner (1963-1965) prior to Botswana’s independence. He and Alan Tilbury published *Botswana: Road to Independence*. Gaborone: Pula Press and The Botswana Society, 2000.

²⁰ Legislative Council, which operated from 1961 until the 1965 elections, was an elective body consisting of African and European members.

²¹ The Imperial Reserve inside Mafeking (adjacent to the Barolong town of Mafikeng) had been the seat of Protectorate administration since 1895. Botswana was the only ex-British possession to be governed from outside the colony.

the excitement and hard work on election campaign and moving. I must say by the time I got back here, I felt like writing to their Minister of Transport and asking him to hurry up with putting on a commercial air service, even though it will cost me lots more money.

My mother went to England for a holiday just 2 days after the Bechuanaland elections. So I missed seeing her when I went down. She is staying with my aunt in London, and will be away about 2 months I think, maybe more; unfortunately she got a septic foot fairly early on, and I think this has hampered her in getting about. It was a pity she had to miss the ceremony in Gaborone, but it was a question of taking a sailing when one was available.

12 November 1967 Kitwe

The wall [at my place] was finished the weekend Ruth and Seretse payed a State visit to Zambia, and spent a day on the Copperbelt, and visited us for cocktails, along with a retinue of around 40. It was quite hilarious, during the week before this great event, we had conflicting reports from Mine officials, Police, Party officials and Government Officers concerning their hour of arrival, and number of attending cohorts. It varied from 3-6 pm on Sunday. In the end they arrived about 5 pm, along with the Vice President,²² several Cabinet Ministers, local Government Secretary, party leaders and hangers-on, and for 45 minutes it was pandemonium, while we madly tried to serve everyone with something to drink. They should have stayed for 2 hours, but the Security had the last word, they wanted to get them to the Presidential Guest House by 6:15 when it became dark. Even the Vice President's wife²³ could not finish feeding her new baby which she had with her. I told him it wasn't much fun being Vice P. if you didn't have the last word. After they had gone, we sat and relaxed for ½ hour with a few close friends who were invited, then followed Ruth and Seretse to the Guest House to have dinner with them. There were 10 for dinner, but we managed to get an hour or so alone with them after, in their suite. We also dashed out next morning and had breakfast with them, then followed the procession to Kitwe airport where Seretse inspected the local army battalion and carried out the usual saluting game. So, although we kept on being told how fortunate we were seeing them at all, it was rather frustrating that it had to be so rushed and public. Apparently it just isn't protocol for a visiting head of state to pay private calls, but it was the Zambian government who arranged for them to stay in Kitwe so they could visit us.

Since then, I have tried to phone, but the line was so bad I gave up. My mother had another stroke on the eve of their Independence Day, (Sept 30th) and has been quite bed-ridden ever since, and can't last much longer.

My aunt came out again and spent September with us. She had stayed in Botswana since last September, decided to stay there for good, returned to England to pack up and then returned via Kitwe. She is still very fit and lively, tho' 80 in January. She is now helping to nurse my mother. The rest of the family is fine, Jackie is going to spend a year in Europe when she leaves school next month, Ian is enjoying boarding school in Swaziland, and the twins attending the local primary school in Gaborone. They are growing up fast, and I am sorry not to be seeing them.

18 November 1969 Kitwe

I am planning to go to Botswana for Christmas. I haven't seen Ruth and Seretse for two years now, although I did see all the kids last year. Jackie is still at secretarial school in England. She was home for 2 months in July and August. I am not sure when Ian takes O levels but it must be soon, he is doing much better at his school in Swaziland and likes it very much. The twins are due to go to high school soon, but I don't know where they will go, so I shall find out when

²² Quett (later Sir) Ketumile Joni Masire (1925-2017), Vice President of Botswana (1965-1980).

²³ Gladys Olebile Molefi Masire (MmaGaone) (1933-2014).

I go down. I shall probably bring back my aunt for a holiday with me, she stayed 3 months earlier this year, and will probably do the same again.

4 November 1970 Kitwe

The real highlight this year was the non-aligned conference in Lusaka in September.²⁴ The British and American press played it down very much, which I think shows they were a bit worried about it, but it seemed rather petty and mean. Here in Zambia, we had nothing else for the whole week, and quite a lot before. When Zambia offered to be hosts just 4 months before the conference, there was no suitable hall, and nowhere near enough hotel accommodation! So, we just built it, with the most considerable help of the Yugoslavs, which President Tito had been keen to push on his state visits earlier in the year to various African countries. The hall and "Village", named after a tiny place in the bush called 'Mulungushi' where UNIP had some important annual conferences, were built on a round the clock routine, 24 hours of shifts. The village consists of 60 houses, quite spread out around good roads, with the hall -absolutely super with everything needed for a big international conference -at one end, on the road to the airport, near parliament and the university. The houses are 4-bedroomed (all double) spacious lounge, 3 bathrooms, entrance hall, dining room and kitchen, all built round an open quadrangle. Each head of delegation was allocated a house, and Pres. Kaunda and Betty moved out to the village for the week, just next but one to the Khamas. Ruth and Seretse brought Ian as it was his last week of holiday, and they came for 6 days on a regular scheduled flight.

I had gone down with flue the week before, and just did not feel up to going to meet them, in fact I almost decided not to go at all, I was feeling so horrible. But I found someone to drive my car down (220 miles) to Lusaka, and I flew on the Wednesday, staying with the Botswana High Commissioner for just bed and breakfast, and spending the rest of the day with Ruth and Ian, and Seretse when he was free. I never anticipated spending so much time with them, and I even got into the hall for a morning, where I heard Seretse, Mrs.[Indira] Ghandi, and Pres. [Jean-Bédél] Bokassa speak, among others. As you can imagine, the security was tremendous, there were nearly 20 Presidents or P.M.'s and I think over 20 second in commands, so they had to be careful. I wanted to take the family out to dinner, but although they did not refuse, they asked me not to as it would have strained security to its limits. I was most impressed with the smoothness with which everything went off, the Minister in Charge of this, Aaron Milner, is the only Coloured member of the Cabinet. There were 2 other wives from abroad, Mrs. [Jovanka] Tito Broz, and Mrs. [Viola] Forbes Burnham of Guyana. These 2 are keenly interested in politics, Ruth and Betty Kaunda rather less so. Mrs. K gave a tea party to all the lady delegates, and cabinet wives, to which I was invited, but it was during an afternoon session when Mrs. Ghandi and Mrs. [Sirimavo] Bandaranaike of Ceylon²⁵ were chairing, so they could not come, -shame. Mrs. Tito is very charming, but speaks little English, she had an interpreter with her. Mrs. Forbes Burnham is also rather gorgeous, her husband had been a student in London with Seretse in the same hostel, I remembered him well. The Vice Pres. of Cameroun was also in the hostel, and a Sudanese who I think is Foreign Minister, altogether there were 5 at the summit from Nutford House hostel!²⁶

It is hard to assess the value of the conference. The speeches lasted 2½ days, much too long. Pres. [Julius] Nyerere handed his in to save time, and obviously hoped others would follow, but the only one was Pres. [Milton] Obote. The last half of the day the resolutions were

²⁴ The third conference of Non-Aligned Heads of State, 8-10 September 1970.

²⁵ Sri Lanka after 1972.

²⁶ Immediately after the Second World War, Muriel [then Williams] often visited Nutford House, London, a colonial students' hostel with close ties to the London Missionary Society, led discussion groups there, and came to know many of the residents. Seretse Khama was a Nutford resident, and it was Muriel who introduced him to her sister Ruth, in June 1947, at a Nutford dinner and dance.

rushed through, and if any had objections they could lodge them later. I think the strength of finding 62 nations not in the 2 main blocks was encouraging in itself, with the ultimate judging of its worth will come much later.

I saw Ruth and Seretse off at the airport on the Saturday they left, we all went in a police cavalcade down the middle of the road, everyone held up, I bet Lusaka residents were glad when it was over. At the airport leaving too were Prince Dlamini of Swaziland on the same plane (his High Commissioner had forgotten to book so he was weightlisted [sic]. Seretse told some of his chaps to get off the plane, which they did, then they found room for everyone, so this delayed them all quite a bit.) The PM of Afghanistan, Vice Pres of Liberia, and Vice Pres. of Cameroun were all in the VIP lounge, and also the Forbes Burnham's on their way to Kitwe, they were on a state visit. Poor old KK [Kenneth Kaunda], he spent most of the day seeing off his guests, inspecting their guards, listening to the 21 gun salutes, and waving goodbye. I then drove back to Kitwe with my colleague who had come to cover the conference press-wise. Back to earth! But I certainly forgot my flu, and the 5 course meals twice a day with the family certainly helped me to pull up.

7 November 1971 Kitwe

For the first time for several years, I shall not be going to join the family in Botswana this Christmas. Since I last wrote, I have been there twice -last Christmas for 10 days, and in May for a week for Jackie's 21st birthday. During the 10 days last Xmas, I visited 3 towns -I arrived in Gaborone on the 23rd, stayed there until Boxing Day, when we set off by road for Serowe, where we stayed 4 days, they went by road again to Francistown, where Seretse bought a farm during the previous year. It was **most unusual**, because there was so much rain, I saw rivers flowing that before had always been dried up river beds. The reason we did not fly was because of the very low clouds, and we were not sure we could get through as the roads were so badly flooded in places. We were quite a convoy -a police land rover in front, then our lovely room Chev, then Ian driving their private van with lots of bedding, servants, and things Ruth was taking up to the Francistown farm, then last another land rover which Jackie chose to drive. **If the floods had been worse we would have transferred from the Chev to the police land rovers, but we made it alright. But it was slow going, and took much longer than it should.** The rains kept it much cooler than usual, usually it is so hot that we flake out. Francistown is planning a new town, the copper mines at Selibe Pikwe are going into production in 72 or 73, and the place will no doubt grow beyond recognition. At present it is a dump, and a few horses tied up to posts around the main street would not look out of place. Jackie could not come to Francistown as she had to get back to work, she is at the National Development Corporation, but plans to go to Mexico City University in January.

Her 21st birthday in May was a lovely occasion, about 150 were invited, and it was a most pleasant occasion, not too formal, but most of us wore ball gowns. Her favourite band played for several hours, but I felt sorry that the formality of State House meant that when the grownups started leaving around 2 am, her friends did not stay on and continue on their own. The twins insisted on staying up, but we found them around midnight sound asleep, fully dressed, on the top landing on settees which had been taken out of the main state room. She had some lovely gifts, one of which I borrowed the next night, when the local Lions Club put on a film charity performance. It was a lovely fur fabric jacket, unfortunately she had just bought herself one the month before, so as she could not wear them both I scrounged the wearing of one. R and S also have a farm 10 miles outside Gaborone, and we all went there on the Sunday for a barbecue lunch and long naps.²⁷ They go there most weekends. I had quite a time with transport coming back.

²⁷ Kenmoir farm, known more popularly as [Ruth Seretse.]

The National Airways of Botswana were losing so much money on their direct link to Zambia that they cancelled it with just 3 weeks notice beforehand. My only way back by air was via S. Africa and Malawi, and I need a visa for S. Africa, as the flights do not connect and I had to spend a whole day in Johannesburg (24 hours). To get a visa, you have to send your passport to S. Africa, and this I would not do, but in any case there was no time to get it there and back. I tried to hitch a ride with one of the many private planes which pop up and down, but none fitted in. So Seretse had to get me a visa laid on specially. This the S. African government was glad to do, as they are trying to get pally with African states and promote the dialogue idea, but they also told the private secretary that a member of the State Security (BOSS)²⁸ would be there to meet me and make sure my stay was 'without incident' -interpreted by Seretse to mean that they would try to see what information they could get from me. Well, I was rather disappointed. This little man was such a bore, and certainly not impressive, and did not appear to be very intelligent. He had been in Botswana Police previously for 12 years and knew most people there, and seemed much more intent on telling me all he knows about the country than pumping me. He booked me into the most ritzy new hotel -all suites -and had paid in advance, so I sent him the travelers cheques after I returned, as he refused to accept it at the time. He insisted on being around, so I insisted on going to the theatre that evening to save having an evening's conversation. He dragged [me] round the shops next day, and then took me up Radio Tower. It was quite an experience I suppose, but I found it difficult to connect this man with the article I read recently in the 'Observer' about the highly organised BOSS and its smart and tricky personnel!

This travel complication is the main reason I am not going down this Christmas, Zambia airways is going to restart direct flights, but so far no date has been announced. Also, it will be once a week, on Mondays, whereas before there were 3. In addition, I have no leave left this year, but I could have borrowed a week from next year, but having flights on Mondays makes it a bit tricky, and then if the family do their usual move round the country to their various country seats, they would probably be miles from any airport or strip where I needed to return. So after lots of dithering, I finally decided to stay here.

Botswana undoubtedly has a very good future, as they have such a variety of mineral wealth, compared to Zambia's mono-economy. The diamonds went into production this year, the copper as I said will be in a year or two, there is salt in the salt pans which will produce a lot, a huge coal field has been discovered (2nd largest in the world).²⁹ The coal is not such a high quality, but the mines can gear their smelters to the quality of coal available. For the time being I understand they will not be exporting, but at least they don't have to import. Their beef is sold to Britain, and the Bushman Industries (skins, etc) are going from strength to strength. Politically they are of course in a most unenviable position vis a vis S. Africa, but the tightrope walking act is going on. From the internal point of view, things seem pretty calm, the opposition does not seem very active or effective.

19 August 1972 Kitwe

I flew via Livingstone, which is a long way round, but otherwise there is only one plane a week via Lusaka on Mondays, and I wanted to be there for Easter. I arrived in Livingstone at mid-day, and was having lunch when the Airways man came to tell me there would be some delay as the plane was grounded with a burst tyre. It was only a small 8 seater anyway, but at a nearby little place in Botswana there was another little plane waiting to go back to Gaborone the next day. Among the people delayed was an official of Botswana Airways, and he spent hours trying to get through with the Zambia Airways people to contact Botswana. But, the only telephone

²⁸ Bureau of State Security.

²⁹ Botswana's coal deposits, recently estimated at 2 billion tons, rank it 4th among the world's largest.

or telex links are via Rhodesia, and as they all thought there would be no messages, they all shut up shop and went home. It was not until 5.30 that any sense was made of anything, and then we learnt there would be no flight that day, and they hoped we could leave next day at mid-day. Those hours at the airport seemed endless, and for me it was somehow even worse coming so soon after my divorce and all its nervous tension. The next problem was to find hotel rooms. Easter is a favourite time to visit Livingstone and the [Victoria] Falls, and we drove around in the pouring rain for 2 hours trying to get fixed up. In the end we did, at a rather run-down little hotel, but at least we got a meal -at 9 pm, and a bed.

I tried to ring my aunt at State House -Ruth, Seretse and the family were all at the annual [Botswana Democratic Party] party convention at Francistown -but there was no answer. The original plan was for me to fly to Francistown on this little plane, spend a day and night there, then fly on to Gaborone to be with my aunt until the family returned on Easter Monday. I thought at least Ruth would know about the delay. But when we finally left L'stone and got to F'town, I found they had all gone to the airport the previous day, not knowing the plane had never even left! The local officials had not realised Ruth had her sister coming so did not tell them. By the time I arrived in F'town I had lost my connection to Gaborone, but luckily Zambia had sent 2 Cabinet ministers to the party meeting and they had a chartered plane laid on to return early to Gaborone, so I flew with them and the Botswana Minister of Trade. Ruth had managed to get a message through to my aunt.

After such a disastrous start, I had a nice stay there. I managed to fit in a visit to Parliament, which is not much bigger than Kitwe City Council, and very friendly. They were discussing quite an important bill, so almost everyone was there. But how ridiculous protocol is. Seretse was there, not in the house but in the restaurant, chatting up various ministers and keeping an eye on how the debate was going. But I could not drive back with him. I have no idea why. I did not mind the walk at all, but he was full of apologies. We had a day out at their farm, about 10 miles outside Gaborone, where Seretse has cattle, and grows fruit and veg. The mineral development in Botswana is really coming on, and no doubt at all they will be very comfortable one day. This year for the first time they did not need aid from UK -a miracle. I never believed it possible so soon.

Ian went to Sandhurst in AprilThe twins are going to a new school in Gaborone, where they are boarders, only allowed out on Sundays.³⁰ The school is starting one year at a time... A very nice couple, Dean Yates, are running it. I was invited out to supper with them as we have mutual friends, here at Mindolo.

11 November 1972 Kitwe

Some of you know that I celebrated my 50th birthday 11 days ago. Celebrated is the right word this time -it lasted for over a week! I started off by buying myself a new car -for the very first time -as I figured out that nobody else was likely to. I got this the week before, it is a Morris Marine 1300, 4 door, in a gorgeous shade of mustard yellow. I really am appreciating having a brand new car to drive. Then, that week beforehand, one or two visitors were around from Lusaka, who were not going to be here for my party on the 28th, so they took me out to dinner. The party I had jointly with Jeremy Peake whose birthday was the week before, and we invited 50 guests although in the end only 38 could come. Jeremy is a jolly good cook, so he made a curry, and his wife Min organised the salads, all I had to do was to buy some cooked chickens for those not wanting curry. We were very lucky, the rain held off, it was very hot, and we were able to have the glass doors right open and spread all over the balcony and garden. We also organised 4 servants to do the serving and washing up, so I have never had such an easy time. Other friends brought a superb birthday cake.

³⁰ Maru-a-Pula School

This of course was great fun, but was made into a small anti-climax by the phone call I had the previous day from Eric Gillespie in Lusaka. He and his wife Pam used to be in Kitwe. Eric is an accountant, and he rang to say he had to go to Gaborone the next week on the 31st to make arrangements to be down there for a special job for 3-4 months, and as there was a spare seat on the plane, would I like to go? Would I? Wow. I just couldn't believe it. So I rang Ruth that night, and asked if they would be there, and luckily they were, they were due to go away on Thursday 2nd, and we were returning on the 1st. I had no tax clearance certificate, but luckily someone I know had to go to Chingola -30 miles away -to get one also, so got mine. In fact, everything just worked out perfectly. We flew from Ndola, 45 miles away, on a 6 seater twin engine Piper, the pilot lives in Kitwe so I duly reported at his house at 4.30 a.m. on my birthday, and we drove to Ndola leaving there at 6 am, picking up Eric, Pam and the kids in Lusaka. We got to Gaborone at 11.30, taking only 45 minutes longer than the scheduled flight, where my aunt met me. Ruth and Seretse had arranged a dinner party for the people I know there, and Eric and Pam were invited, but could not come to dinner as they had a business dinner, but they did come for an hour for drinks.

I had made a cotton evening dress for the 28th party, so took it with me, and although Ruth had not intended wearing a long dress, she sportily phoned the women and asked them to do likewise. It so happens that the Zambia High Commissioner to Botswana, John Sokoni, is an old friend of mine, and it so happens he was born the same day and year as me. So Ruth and Seretse asked him without mentioning I would be coming or that they knew it was his birthday. So he had a big surprise. His wife was back here in Zambia visiting family, so the 'twins' were dinner partners -most convenient! Jackie and her fiancé were there, but not the twins, but they came home in the afternoon. Their headmaster is an old friend of the Jeremy mentioned above, and he came to the party as I have got to know them through Jeremy. We left the next day at 3 pm, so I had 27½ hours there. We got back even quicker than we flew down, and I enjoyed very much the last bit from Lusaka to Kitwe after dark, flying fairly low, so we could even pick out streets of a town we passed. Kitwe (Kitwe airstrip for private planes) has no lights at night, and until then I had no idea planes could land after dark, but they had put out a few hurricane lamps which the pilot spotted with no difficulty at all. So, I can honestly say I had a memorable birthday -800 miles each way for a dinner party! Everyone at Mindolo was tickled pink.

On Sunday 31st, the new Bishop of Botswana will be installed and consecrated in Gaborone, so we will all be back in time for that.³¹ It is a most unsuitable date for most people; Gaborone is non-tribal land -the government shuts down for a week between Christmas and New Year so that people can go back to their tribal areas to look at their cattle and plant crops. It is right in the middle of the main school holidays, when most expats take their annual leave. The date was fixed by the Bishop in Rhodesia without any consultation, and he is not exactly popular over this. It is precisely because the church there was part of the Rhodesian diocese that they fought to become independent -although there are only 18 churches in the country -it must be one of the smallest dioceses from this point of view, although territorially it must be one of the largest. When I got back from my 2 day trip I found the R[oman] C[atholic] Bishop from Gaborone and the Anglican vicar at a conference at Mindolo, so I had them round for a meal along with another RC bishop from Lesotho.

24 October 1973 Kitwe

This year I was in Botswana for the 7th independence celebrations on 30th September, but that was not my main reason for going. Ruth and Seretse celebrated their silver wedding anniversary on the 29th September, and after being undecided for weeks, I finally went down for a week.

³¹ The Anglican Diocese of Botswana had just been established as part of the Church of the Province of Central Africa. Rt. Rev. Charles Shannon Mallory was installed as its first Bishop.

But oh dear, flying these days seems to get more and more drawn out. The quicker the planes go, the more breakdowns, and long airport waits. It is 4 hours flying time from Kitwe to Gaborone; once a week I can get a direct flight from Lusaka to Gaborone, and once a week I have to change at Francistown where there is only an hour before the next plane leaves. Well, first the connecting flight from Kitwe to Lusaka was full even though I booked 6 weeks beforehand, so I had to go down to Lusaka the night before. Then the connecting flight got propeller trouble as it landed and we had a four hour wait at Francistown before they decided they had no plane to relieve it in S. Africa, so the engineer was told what to do to permit just one landing, thus cutting out Gabs and having to fly direct to Johannesburg, returning the next day to Gaborone. On our plane held up this way were 5 ambassadors from [to] Zambia who are also accredited to Botswana going down for independence, and one, the Indian, did not relish the idea of going to S. Africa, although he was assured the situation had been cleared by radio. I decided I did not want to go there either, so I stayed behind and took the train which is a 12 hour journey for 250 miles. I know the airways people quite well at F'town, so they got in touch with Ruth to tell her, of course with 5 ambassadors on board the activity in Gaborone among all the embassies there was quite hectic. So I arrived at 7.30 Friday morning having left Kitwe 5pm Wednesday evening on what was 4 hours flying time -but took nearly 40 hours!

The weather took a sudden turn from being boiling hot to quite cold and even rain. There was a freak cold spell all over southern Africa, and some places even had hail and snow. So I froze on the train in my light clothing, and had to borrow from Ruth most of the time I was there. Of course everyone in Botswana was delighted to have rain and a respite from the terrific heat.

Owing to the successive days of silver wedding and independence, the silver wedding was rather quiet, we just had a family dinner party. There is always an annual ball run by different charities on the eve of independence which of course is their wedding anniversary, so after dinner we all went to it, run by the Red Cross this year, of which Ruth is Hon. President.³² So as soon as we arrived Ruth and Seretse were congratulated and danced the anniversary waltz alone! Rather like old days when they sometimes stopped the dancing and everyone stood round to watch. We all enjoyed the dance very much and stayed until 1am which is quite late for all tastes. Ian and the twins were very dutiful and asked their aunt and great aunt to dance, and we both did pretty well all round. My aunt was easily the oldest person there by at least 25 years; I know quite a little nucleus and didn't sit many out. Ruth and Seretse had some lovely gifts and considering how rare silver is out here, they did pretty well. I settled for stainless steel, with little silver keyrings as a token. Ruth gave Seretse a silver Afrikander heifer, and he gave her a silver Chev. car. Altogether a pleasant occasion.

Ruth and Seretse looked pretty tired. They have had a hectic year. Apart from their fairly frequent 2 week trips around the country when they stay in their own caravan, often right out in the bush, they have been to Ethiopia for the annual O.A.U. [Organisation of African Unity] meeting, Montreal for the Commonwealth heads of state, and a state visit to Tanzania, when they took the twins, who saw the sea for the first time ever. They loved it, and goggled and went on the coral reef and enjoyed themselves. But in 6 days they slept in a different town each night. The day before I left to come back, they went to Lesotho for their independence, just 3 days after their own, on another state visit.

Independence celebrations are often similar in African countries. This year being a Sunday, there was a 2-day split, with the church service in the stadium on the Sunday, followed by the stadium awards of medals on Monday, and displays of marching, bands, and other things by youth organisations and the police. Then in the afternoon a football match. In the evening

³² Lady Khama had helped to found the Red Cross in Serowe in 1960 and served as its national president for many years.

R and S give a double cocktail party, first in the house for cabinet and ambassadors, then an hour later all go out into the gardens where about 500 people are invited, and they wander round. So I met my ambassador traveling companions again, plus the residents there. The American couple are very charming, they are black, and the British one is a woman, and so is the Swedish.

Ian graduated...from Sandhurst in February having done very well and really shining as a late developer. He loved it and came top in French and military strategy.

On my last evening there, with Ruth and Seretse away in Lesotho, I took some of my friends out to dinner, as I could not split myself between them all. Some of you might know the Jones and Locks, both missionaries of the Congregational Church -the latter is also the Speaker of Parliament.³³ Also in the party were a couple who used to be in Kitwe, Heather and Dieter Muller, and the headmaster of the twins' school, Dean Yates and his wife. To add to the mixture, my aunt and Ian came, and Derek's mother, Mrs. Jones, and in spite of ranging from 20 to 86, it was a really lovely evening.

29 September 1974 Kitwe

I went to Botswana for 10 days, and had a good rest, apart from the party [Ian's 21st birthday]. This was on the Saturday after, and was for over 200 guests. It was a real mixture of Ian's friends, family friends, government and diplomats. He had some lovely presents, of course. We did the usual refreshments, guests were supposed to have had dinner first, but the snacks were adequate enough to make do for those who hadn't. Ian made a very witty speech...

The day after his birthday, he was commissioned as an officer in the police. Since I left he has learnt to fly and got his licence in 3 months.

8 September 1975 Kitwe

Ruth and Seretse did come for 2 days to Lusaka after all, being so sure of winning their elections, but I didn't see them. My god-daughter, Muriel Nkonde, decided to get married 2 days after the big independence celebrations, and in Lusaka; if I had gone down to see Ruth and then stay over the wedding, that would have meant 4-5 days absent, and the salaries would not have been paid! In any case, Ruth and Seretse were busy the whole time they were here, and although I did manage to speak to them by phone, it was between dashing back from one engagement and getting ready to go for another. As you probably know, Seretse came at least 3 times (I lost count) last Oct-December trying to sort out the Rhodesian problem, and I never managed to see him at all, because he flew in and out at such short notice and with a certain amount of secrecy. Each time either he rang me, or I heard on the BBC African News that he was in Lusaka, and I rang him!

I went to Botswana for Christmas and spent 3 weeks there, longer than usual. When I arrived, Ruth, Seretse and Dale had already left for Serowe, so I had 3 days in Gaborone with my aunt and Ian, and then he drove us to Serowe, the day after Jackie and Johann went up - they had been away for a few days and Ruth was only too happy to be a contented grandmother. When we arrived, Seretse, Johann and the twins were out on a 3 day safari, looking at cattle and hunting.

We went to Serowe for a week, over Christmas, with the whole family together. Then Ian and Jackie and Johann returned to Gaborone, then Ian flew up here to Ndola to see some friends, I was sorry he came while I was down there. The kids don't like being away in the bush over holidays knowing the parties they are missing back with their friends. On the 27th or 28th we then drove -Seretse, Ruth, the twins, my aunt and I -to Seretse's 20,000 acre cattle ranch literally in the middle of nowhere. The house there is surprisingly nice for being so

³³ The Rev. Derek and Mrs. Joan Jones, The Rev. Albert and Mrs. Lock.

remote. I knew what I was in for, we went prepared with plenty to read, and I actually wrote about 25 letters (but I've hardly written any since!) Seretse and the boys went hunting every evening, and we ate such delicacies as iguana and warthog and antelope. I can recommend iguana -Seretse did not tell us what he was cooking and gave it to us to taste. It was delicious to my mind, but the boys were disgusted to be deceived! The days drifted by, spoilt only by poor old Seretse having a very badly infected tooth after an extraction, and Ruth getting a bad bite. So the dentist flew out to give S. antibiotics, and the twins persuaded their mother to let the dentist fly them back for 3-4 days to spend New Year with their friends in Gaborone. It's an ill wind.... So, our New Year was very quiet, and rather painful for half the rump of the family left!

It was an exciting time to be there because James Callaghan³⁴ was flying around visiting the Southern African politicians, and I flew in with Seretse when he went to meet him for a couple of hours. At one point the Rhodesian nationalists were due to arrive, too, but things got messed up somehow. My chief function that week was getting all the possible radio stations I could find to hear all the news bulletins with their various slants and extra bits of information. I stayed with my missionary friends the Derek Jones's for the last 3 days before returning here. All the planes had been terribly booked for weeks, and I had problems getting down and back, and sent a telex to friends to meet me. But it was hours later coming in, and Jackie, who had taken me to the airport, dragged me off to take her out to lunch, and when I got back they had sold my ticket. A previous staff member from Mindolo was also trying to get back to Lusaka, so we managed to get on the plane the next day. It is almost impossible to travel in or out of Zambia without meeting people one knows; I hadn't been able to get in touch with friends to meet me at Ndola airport with the changed flight, so gambled on meeting someone I knew at Lusaka airport waiting for the Ndola flight, and, of course, there was someone, from my bank.

Ian is now in Belgium doing a commercial pilots course. And he had only been there 2 weeks when Ruth and Seretse and the twins spent a few days in London en route for the Commonwealth Heads of State conf. in Jamaica, and he got a long weekend to fly over and show the twins round England -their first ever visit. According to my aunt who wrote later, the twins made quite a hit with the royal family.... After the conference, they all went to visit Guyana and Barbados.

August 1977 Kitwe

In my last letter, I mentioned that some relatives were coming to visit. 3 of them came last December for 2 weeks, my aunt, my cousin from Australia, and her sister from Surrey (England). They had all come up from Botswana, where they had spent 2 weeks. But Ruth and Seretse were in Johannesburg almost all that time, where Seretse was having his pacemaker installed. He has had trouble with it healing where they leads come out of the veins, but eventually they moved it recently at Guy's hospital, and we are hoping it will be OK now.

It sounds as though my life is all holidays -out here it is quite usual to get 6 weeks [leave] a year. As we also get quite generous public holidays during the year, if they are joined up it is all the better. I went to Botswana for a 10 days spell in June-July, out of which there were 2 weekends and 2 public holidays, so it was only one week of actual leave. I arrived the day after Ruth and Seretse had returned from their 3 weeks trip to England and Belgium, for the heads of Commonwealth conference, the silver jubilee, and a visit to the EEC. The first week Seretse was in hospital having his pacemaker leads readjusted, so he had to take it easy. The night they were at the banquet at Buckingham palace he had to have a dressing changed, so the Queen arranged for a room to be turned into a Red X station and a doctor and nurse laid on for his convenience. He also had his own doctor with him, who was allowed in to supervise

³⁴ Leonard James Callaghan, British Prime Minister (1976-1979), Labour Party.

the operation. He was thrilled to bits! It was such a shame that the weather was so awful, If only it had been like the last 2 summers. The BBC overseas service put on quite a few extra programmes covering the events, so I could follow Ruth's progress, and of course heard quite a lot about it all from her. I gather the weekend in Scotland was terribly hectic, not at all restful, and they could have done with an extra day to relax.

Ian is now a Brigadier, second in command of the new army, which must be the smallest in the world.³⁵ I had the privilege (?) of sewing on his badge on to his army hat (cap?). Wow, it was difficult. You all know my prowess at sewing is about nil, and I wondered why I got the job, apparently Ruth was fed up with sewing on badges to his police cap every time he changed it. The twins are taking a City and Guilds course in some sort of mechanics at the local college of technology, and are enjoying the course very much.

Every time I go to Botswana I am determined to visit one of the areas I haven't seen, some quite close to Gaborone, but as usual I failed to do so. If only the Zimbabwe situation could be sorted out Botswana would have a fantastic future, they have just found a third diamond pipe in a completely undeveloped area.³⁶ But with all the uncertainty around, it is difficult. Also, the new Bantustan to be created in S. Africa in December, whose name I can never remember, but composed of Tswana people in S. Africa, will affect them very much.³⁷ This new Bantustan will be fragmented into 6 parts, and the main railway line from Rhodesia through Botswana to S. Africa will pass through one of the bits. As Botswana has no intention of recognising it (like everyone else), it will create real problems which so far are not resolved. This railway is the main link for Botswana to the outside world.³⁸

March 1978 Kitwe

On the 29th I flew to Botswana for 5 days to celebrate my aunt's 90th birthday on 1st January. They were staying on the cattle ranch, so I flew to Francistown where Ruth met me in Seretse's Range Rover. They had also had exceptional rains, and we were driving on bush roads so needed sturdy transport. We also had a police escort. We got a puncture and they broke down so we took over 5 hours to do what is normally a 3 hour journey. Jackie was there with Dale, she is expecting a baby any time and wants it born in Botswana. On the 1st, the twins flew up with Ian from Gaborone, along with 2 other friends of the family, and friends of Jackie drove up with their mother...altogether we were 17 for the birthday lunch. It was a very pleasant occasion.

I drove back to Gaborone with Jackie's friends, we were lucky to get through because 2 days later the road was quite flooded and for a month was closed to all traffic. I stayed the night with the boys, then left next day and at the airport found I was flying with Donald Woods, the S. African editor friend of Steve Biko, and his family. At Francistown airport our pilot took a short cut across the grass and there we stayed for 5 hours, stuck firmly in the mud. All the male passengers were invited to help push! And tho they managed the front wheels, the one under the engine and wing was quite a different matter. Another plane come to collect refugees eventually took some out, and the rest of us left on our original plane. I wish I had taken my camera.

³⁵ The Botswana Defence Force, formed in 1977 mainly from officers and men in the Botswana Police's Mobile Unit, in response to the security problems along the border with Rhodesia.

³⁶ In Jwaneng, 70 km northwest of Kanye. The mine was opened in 1982.

³⁷ Bophuthatswana.

³⁸ The railway, moreover, was operated by the Rhodesian Railways. In spite of attempts to nationalise the railway, it was not until Zimbabwean independence in 1980 that discussions began for the handover of this portion of the rail line. Botswana assumed control in 1987.

21 September 1980 Kitwe

As soon as I heard the BBC news bulletin that Seretse had an incurable illness, I made arrangements to fly to Gaborone on the first plane, I rang the Botswana High Commission in London next day and heard that he had already returned to Gaborone, I then tried to ring Ruth but the lines were not working so I telexed his office and 'spoke' to the senior PPS[Personal Private Secretary]. Both said I should get there as soon as possible. So I got the Wednesday plane, and learnt afterwards that the London specialists had only given him till that day to live. When he and Ruth flew to London the week before, they had no idea he had cancer. I was there in May for a week, and I was amazed to see that he was then on a 2 hourly diet of liquids and food, and had been like that on and off for 6 months, -still working normally. His regular doctor, [Alfred Musgrave] Merriweather, a Scottish missionary who had been at Molepoloe for well over 30 years, was on 4 months leave as he had been appointed President of his church for a year. So others were attending to him, and they decided that his pancreatic condition had gone on too long. I heard he had gone for a check-up, but wasn't too worried, because I thought if he was very bad he would have gone to Johannesburg. Fortunately, Ian was in Europe at the time, so immediately rushed to London to be with Ruth. The government put an air force plane at their disposal, and when I telephoned that Monday to the high commission they told me it had just put down in the Indian Ocean because of engine trouble -but only for an hour.

I certainly didn't expect to find him so alert when I arrived. Cancer of the pancreas is not painful so he wasn't on drugs that doped him. He saw his cabinet ministers and close friends and relatives for quite long periods. A specialist from America flew over and confirmed the London doctors' diagnosis, only gave him one week longer. The weekend after I arrived, he rallied incredibly. We all watched Wimbledon men's final on TV in his room -the whole match, which he really enjoyed.³⁹ He came into the garden for tea in a wheelchair next day and Jackie's two boys were there, playing around, which amused him. On the Monday he was also pretty bright and came out to teach again. But next day he started to feel pain, and from then on he sank pretty quickly day by day. The doctors kept thinking he would die the next day, but he hung on until the following Sunday. Dr. [Alfred M] Merriweather stayed in the house all the time, Ruth and the twins helped during the night when required. I couldn't help thinking all the time how awful it must be for people who have loved ones with cancer, when it drags out for months and months -what a terrible strain.

Ruth was marvellous. She had known for years that with all his health problems the chances of him living to a great age were nil, but she had not thought anything like cancer could take him away. The day arrived, I found half the cabinet and relatives in the house, where they visited every day (those of you who know something about African customs, will be surprised that they did not come until the late afternoon). Right to the end, she was concerned about his diabetes and diet, tho he could not eat at all the last week. She was always suggesting things that might help, not wanting to accept the inevitable. The last day he got pneumonia, and then she knew how final it was.

According to African tradition, there should have been people mourning at the house all day every day until the funeral. But it was arranged that the mourning should be at Seretse's cousin's house, not far away, at the end of a close with a park adjoining. There had been public prayers ever since the news of his illness, but gradually the prayers took place each evening in this park, with the city [sic] council gradually providing tents, lights, and seats. The women prepared supper for the mourners from long distances. Seretse's sister Naledi came from Serowe the day they got back from London, so she and I went to the prayers each night with Ian, and sometimes the twins and Jackie. It was most impressive; cabinet and ambassadors

³⁹ The legendary 5-set match between Bjorn Borg and John McEnroe.

turning out regularly. There was quite a discussion as to which should come first, burial or electing of the new President; as this had to be done within 7 days, the election was first, which explains the 12 day delay until the funeral. The new vice Pres is this cousin of Seretse's [Lenyetse Seretse].⁴⁰

That twelve days was pretty awful. On some decisions, the interests of the family, tribe [Bangwato] and government were at cross purposes. Night after night, there were long arguments as to whether to agree or not to some points. It has become the fashion in Africa to leave the coffin open for everyone to pay their last farewells. The family did not want this, but when the public complained that his body was not inside, otherwise why could they not see him, --then the family decided to give way in order to save embarrassing the new President, who was blamed for the decision. The kids all took it in very different ways. I had never been with the family for a whole month before, so got to know them much better.... Every day something turned up; I was very glad I had friends there I could slip away to at times.

The night before the memorial service, KK, Nyerere and Oppenheimer (of Anglo American fame) all came to the house. They were scheduled to come at half hour intervals, but KK stayed on when Julius N arrived, and both stayed on when Harry Oppenheimer arrived; the latter had not met Julius, and I was amused when the latter left, he said 'I can't imagine there is anything in my country to interest you, but if you ever come to Dar, let me know, and we should meet'. I had not met J.N. before, and was really impressed by his charm, but I have read some pretty devastating criticisms of his policies in Tanzania; like so many others, he seems to have become a benevolent dictator.

We went from the house the next day to the Cathedral, where there was requiem mass for the family, then from there to the football stadium for the Memorial Service. This was the public occasion, to which heads of state and others were invited. The Duke of Kent only stayed 24 hours, I was very surprised he did not ask to see Ruth. On his plane he brought Lord David Pitt, who had been the family doctor in London (UK's first black lord). He also brought a missionary couple whose son was to marry the Foreign Minister's daughter; they had an apex ticket and could not travel on that until after the funeral, so hitched a ride! Albert Lock had not long resigned, he had been Speaker of the House for several years. To return to the stadium, it was very impressive and dignified, with another service, where the Bishop Walter Makhudu [Makhulu] spoke, then Quett Masire, the new President, and KK. I have known Quett for some years and am most impressed, I do hope he gets the support he deserves.

That afternoon, Ruth and the kids flew to Serowe, where they also flew the body, and the tribal mourning came to a climax. I stayed with my aunt, who was pretty bowled over by it all, and was too frail to attend anything. I flew to Serowe next morning early with the cabinet and Lord Pitt. The government did not want any outside visitors in Serowe as they just could not cope, but KK, Nyerere and King Leshoshoe [Moshoeshe II of Lesotho] wanted to go, so they were told OK, but make your own arrangements with ambassadors, transport, etc., and expect no food. So they came. I arrived just in time to meet the family in the little church where the coffin had been since the mourning ended in the early hours, so we had another short service, then went to the house, before going to the Kgotla ground for the final meeting. This was held all in Sechuana, and lasted for about 3 hours, before we walked up the steep hill to the Khama family burial ground which is carved out of a solid rock outgrowth. It took them a week to dig the grave. The coffin was very heavy indeed (metal, another disputed item) and so the pallbearers had to change every few minutes owing to the steep climb. Loudspeakers had been put up and the choirs sang beautifully as we climbed to the top. I doubt if anyone has ever had so many carry his coffin. At the top, yet another service, a roman catholic last rights (we are very ecumenical out here). Quite honestly, I expected Seretse to push up the lid and protest

⁴⁰ Lenyetse Mpetwane Seretse (1920-1983), Vice President of Botswana, 1980-1983.

vigorously at all the ceremony, he loved simplicity. But everyone wanted to get in on the act. We all climbed down again, then went back to the house for drinks and a visit to the loo - including KK, Nyerere, and the King. They then all flew off, and I flew back to Gaborone.

I had decided on my way down that I would bring my aunt back with me for at least 3 months to give Ruth a chance to move without having to worry about her. I spent all the next day helping her to pack, into 3 piles -things to go to the farm with Ruth, things to come up here, and rejects. Every time she saw a photo or programme, she had to go over it, so it was quite a day. Noin did not want to come back with me, it was a real upheaval for her. Ruth has just moved to a farm they owned 14 miles outside Gaborone; she wasn't pushed out but she wanted to move as soon as possible. The twins are living in town mostly, so she is mostly alone. She had about 2,000 messages, so will be kept busy for some time answering them all. The government is helping her with 2 secretaries.

I feel very proud to have known Seretse so well and for so long. You all know that I was very fond of him, and had great admiration for him. I can't believe he's not still around. He set a very high standard and I hope his successor can get the support he needs to keep it up. He comes from a small tribe, and in Africa that is difficult. One of the greatest tributes to Seretse was the fact that there have never been any political detainees in Botswana -miraculous.

We had been back here about 5 weeks when my aunt decided to go into the garden to meet me in spite of promising me that she would not leave the house, so what I had dreaded came to pass -the dog knocked her over, and she has a double fracture of the hip. The private clinic I belong to has built a wing in a mine hospital 10 miles away (Kalulushi) so she is now there, on traction for 12 weeks. She is most uncomfortable, unhappy, and it's very hot very early this year. Everyone is very kind, and they fuss over her, but she is pretty low and I wonder if she will survive. If she does, I shall have to learn a lot more patience. The matron lets me go almost any time to visit, so I go every lunchtime, and then again most evenings. My friends accompany me then, as it's not safe to drive alone. I hated having to tell Ruth, but she took it very well, and is coming up for a few days next week (end September). I can't see my aunt ever leaving here now; after all those weeks she will be so weak I doubt if she will walk again. Her leg is healing slowly, but she is already noticeably weaker than she was, after 2 weeks in bed. So, I am very thankful I had such a lovely holiday last year in Seychelles and Australia, as my only 'holiday' this year was in Botswana. We have no facilities whatsoever for old people, I shall be lucky to find a nurse to come in. If I sound rather subdued in this letter, you will understand why!

25 October 1981 Kitwe

On 25th September I went to Botswana for 10 days, as Ruth was to receive a medal on their independence on the 29th. I had forgotten that Nigeria celebrates 1st October, and Swaziland is I think the 5th, and I never had realised that China celebrates something on 27th September. I had imagined a nice quiet 10 days out at the farm, 15 miles from Gaborone, reading and writing. During that time I only had 2 main meals at the farm. One day we had drinks with Ian, lunch with Jackie and the kids at the Holiday Inn, coffee with a doctor friend, tea with the British High commissioner where Ruth scrounged flower cuttings from their magnificent garden, drinks and change of clothes with Jackie at her house, Nigerian reception back at the Holiday Inn (I only ate caviar -red and black) and finally diner with an old friend who has his own law practice. Then when we did get home, we had to unload the aforementioned flower cuttings and dump them in buckets of water. Ruth assures me it's not always like this, but the rest of the week wasn't much slacker. The Botswana Council of Women had their turn to organise the independence Ball, always attend by the President, so 2 afternoons Ruth and I spent trying to decorate the Town Hall along with other members of the BCW. Decorations are not my strong point, but I did my best.

The President and his wife were in Australia for the meeting of Commonwealth heads of state, so the VP was acting Pres., and he is Seretse's cousin.⁴¹ The Army Chief⁴² was also out somewhere was [so] Ian was acting head of the army. So Ruth received her medal from her brother-in-law (by African custom) and her son! It was a real family affair. I sat with Jackie and her two boys, trying to keep them amused, no easy task for 5 hours. They had school kids doing acrobatics, the Zambian national dance troupe visiting and performing much better than I have ever seen them before, one man climbed up a pole that swayed around in the breeze, and he really acted the fool, and lay across the top, it was most impressive. The army finished it all off with a mock war but it was rather humourously done, Ian had been rehearsing them for weeks. The twins were rushing round all over taking pictures.

The Chinese cocktail party (including masses of luscious food) was quite different from usual owing to the presence of a table tennis team touring southern Africa. I have never seen table tennis like it. Real Borg-McEnroe league [Tennis tournament rivals]. They also played against the acting President, and Ian, and anyone else who liked to have a go, and borrowed Ruth's table next day to give a demonstration in the nearby village [Odi]. There was not team good enough to take them on. The Nigerian 'do' is always extravagant, they had also got the Zambian dance troupe there, it was held in the hotel grounds. The Ball was rather quiet and dull, they had the army band which was 2 bands in one, and mixed the music very well, but somehow it never sparked to life. With a few other private lunch and dinner parties, that was the week, that was.

Ruth is making a very busy life for herself, keeping up all her former charitable activities, and starting a new one -the SOS Village Project.⁴³ Right now she is on her way to Manila in the Philippines for a world Red Cross conference and council, and had piles of material to get through beforehand. Her house is looking very nice after all the alterations. It was originally built with four circular rooms (rondavels) joined in the middle. She has made a sort of stalk to the four-leaved clover shape, and added rooms between, it is very attractive, the circular rooms are very large. It is a struggle gardening there with such poor rainfall, and having to dig so deep for a borehole she is careful with the water, so she goes in for desert type flowers, with a few roses and others which she does water. We put some seeds in, planted the geraniums and landscaped a bit, in between our outings. We had to chase out the goats once or twice, and there is one goose left which is so ferocious some nights we had to sit in the car until somebody shooed it away! It obviously makes a difference having the family around, her grandsons visit her often for a weekend; one twin is studying agriculture at a nearby college, the other is still in his garage.

15 October 1983 Kitwe

2 weeks ago I hopped down to Botswana for a week. Most of you won't know that at the end of July Ruth's house burnt out and she lost everything. She had friends staying for a couple of days, they were having dinner, when the maids ran in and said the house was on fire. They just had to jump up and run. The friends had bags packed so they grabbed them, but Ruth got nothing, they were concerned about their cars, so dash out to move them. Ruth has a walkie talkie in the car connected to the twins, so she got them and they rang Ian who brought the army fire brigade. But she lives 15 miles out of town, and Ian is 8 miles on the other side, so what the fire didn't destroy, the water did. The fire burnt for 3 days, and it was the saddest sight I have seen for ages. It was reckoned to be an electrical fault. There were so many beautiful gifts from heads of state all over the world, as well as Khama heirlooms. As usual, I read about

⁴¹ Lenyeletse Mpetwane Seretse (1920-1983) was Vice President from 1980 until his death.

⁴² Major General Mompoti Sebogodi Merafhe, first commander of the Botswana Defence Force (formed 1977).

⁴³ The Children's Village Association of Botswana, established in 1980 to house and nurture destitute, abandoned and orphaned children, is under SOS-Kinderdorf International.

it in the papers, so telephoned my friends the Jones, who had just been with Ruth so I was able to contact her at their mutual friends. She did not suffer from shock for a few weeks, it obviously did not register, but then she became very depressed, didn't eat, and then had fainting fits; during one she fell and hurt her back and neck, and is now in a collar. So I decided I had to try to see her before I went away [to Malaysia]. I had the usual trouble in getting a ticket, as I do not send money out like contract people and being a Zambian I had to produce proof that my sister would support me! Then I heard from Tony on the phone that Ruth was going to Jo'burg for specialist advice on her neck, so could I postpone my trip. I booked for 2 days later, as if I did not go then it would be months before I could get away.

Then Ruth rang from Jo'burg and said could I come as originally planned as she was not staying in Jo'burg and they could meet me there and drive me back to Gaborone. This as 11am Friday, the original flight was 9am Saturday, so I had quite a day revising everything again and packing. It was complicated by the fact that we had a world tourism day dinner in Lusaka that Friday night, and I was going. Well, I made it, and even included everything I needed in my bag. I found Ruth looking just awful, she was in a lot of pain and not sleeping well. She had been able to rent a house, which was in the furthest suburb, no phones, and very new. There is a ban on watering in Botswana, the drought is so bad, so can you imagine everywhere brown powdery dusty sand, it made me realise what a difference a garden makes to a house. She has a 3 bedroomed house.... There is a big garden, but keeping 2 sets of puppies apart (tho I let them play under supervision and it was hilarious to see the St. Bernards knocking over these minute poodles). They just loved each other. There was not much peace. Ruth left the day before me for London on her way to Red Cross meetings in Geneva. I thought she was mad, but realized afterwards that she needed some peace.

Botswana is suffering from recession as are all African countries, with the problem compounded by rising populations and urban invasions from the bush, but it is not as bad as Zambia due to diverse exports, and not just one. The diamond price dropped by I don't know how many hundred %, but it is slowly rising. Beef is exported again after 2-3 years of foot and mouth disease, and they also have copper which is cheaper to mine than in Zambia due to lower wage structures. But the drought is simply awful, some areas have now had no rain for 2 years, and another poor year is forecast throughout Southern Africa. The first rains are usually tropical thunderstorms which hit the hard ground and run off, or cause soil erosion.

I picked a busy week as it was Independence, and also Chinese day, with a super reception and the most gorgeous food. We were invited out, and tried out the new restaurants, and I helped Ruth type thank you letters for cheques received for her Lady Khama Christmas Charity Appeal, to give gifts to hospitals, prisoners, refugees and children in squatter townships. I also helped her prepare wages for her farm, where until her accident she went every lunch time for a picnic, and to keep her accounts and letters up to date, and I suspect for a quiet break! She is planning to rebuild on the same site, and plans are being prepared now.

23 October 1985 Kitwe

I had a very nice visit with Ruth last December, and at Easter she finally moved into her new house. I saw it almost completed, and it is very lovely.

30 August 1986 Kitwe

I got to Botswana with no problem at Christmas, and had a few days in Gaborone, then all the family at different times, except Jackie drove to Serowe for Christmas itself, Ruth and I spent 6 days there. We found Ian already there, conducting his tribal affairs,⁴⁴ on a well earned

⁴⁴ In 1979 Brigadier Ian Khama was installed as the paramount chief of the Bangwato, a position he held in abstentia while he continued to serve full-time as second-in-command in the Botswana Defence Force, vice president and president of Botswana.

holiday from the army where [he] is around inspecting border patrols most of the time. Serowe has grown a lot since I last visited somewhere between 10 and 15 years ago. Bessie Head, a refugee S. African writer lived there many years until her death early this year, and she has written a book on Serowe based on Ronald Blyth's 'Akjenfield' [*Akenfield*] which I found absolutely fascinating.⁴⁵ We visited the Khama grave, on top of a hill commanding a good view of the village -altho its population is about the third biggest in Botswana it is still mostly a mud hut village. We returned to Gabs in convoy and spent the last few days there, visiting friends and the usual diplomatic round. Ruth's new house is really beautiful, and beautifully decorated, but the 5 years drought has reduced her cattle population from 500 to 100, and keeping the farm going is a struggle. She has solar heating and lighting and in 1985 only needed the booster on 3 days. She still keeps active in the Red X, and is starting a children's village which must be opened by now.⁴⁶

While there we arranged that I should meet the family in the north at Chobe on their usual Easter break, this time at a new lodge that Ian had discovered during his patrol visits to the area. This spot is almost exactly half way between Gaborone and Kitwe. They were driving up towing their boat on Maundy Thursday, and I was planning to fly to Livingstone, spend the night on Wednesday (no planes on a Thursday) then hire a taxi the 40 miles to the Zambezi river border at Kazungula, then hitch from the ferry 2 kms to the border post, and then another 3 kms to the lodge. It all worked fine. The booked taxi did not turn up but I found another with the help of my host, Rev. Dennis Whitehead, the local vicar. I got on a huge lorry from the river to the immigration, then a private car from there to this new lodge, and arrived at 1 pm, whereas the family bowled in around 5.30, very tickled at my means of transport. We had a lovely 3 days there, and I was going to stay another day due to the planes again, but we had lunch on Easter Sunday at the Chobe Game Lodge in the park, a rather ritzy joint, and there I met an M? I know from Kitwe, who was driving back alone in his Mercedes Benz (air cond of course) on the Monday, so he picked me up at 6.30am and the family left right after, and we were back in Kitwe by about 5pm. I don't enjoy long distance driving because I get so stiff, we didn't stop except for petrol, but it was a lot better than all the poor connections flying up the next day.

The boat was a great asset as our lodge was right on the Chobe River, and of course Jackie's boys loved it, and even had a go at running it. The one fiasco was to do with Halley's comet. It never rains in March anywhere in Botswana, but we had late rains everywhere this year, and our week was very cloudy. Meanwhile droves of tourists were arriving by air from Europe to come and watch the comet in Africa, and particularly Botswana's clear blue skies. Ruth got up each morning with Dale (11 years old) and never saw it at all. Marcus and I decided to stay in bed, fortunately, he is 7 ½. So I missed it completely, but I gather I did not miss much. We even had a special Wild Life meeting in Kitwe in April, with a knowledgeable speaker, with a drive out planned later to see this marvel, but it was very cloudy so we only had the speech.

July 1989 Kitwe

Another bonus for me, sandwiched in between these 2 visits (the Pope and Archbishop of Canterbury's visits to Kitwe) was the visit to Lusaka of my eldest nephew, Major General Ian Khama.⁴⁷ He came for a meeting, so, as he could not get up to Kitwe, at great expense I flew

⁴⁵ Bessie Head, *Serowe: Village of the Rain-Wind*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1981.

⁴⁶ SOS Children's Village in the Gaborone suburb of Tlokeng.

⁴⁷ Earlier that year Ian had been promoted to Major General and Commander of the Botswana Defence Force following the retirement of Major General Mompoti Merafhe, who entered politics became a member of Parliament.

to Lusaka for the evening to have dinner with him, which was also a great expense for him. It was fun, and I caught up on some recent family news.

Christmas saw me in Botswana for 2 ½ weeks, most in Gaborone, but partly in Serowe, where I still know quite a few people -family and friends. All Ruth's family were there, including her 2 grandsons Dale and Marcus, who are both attending boarding school in England. Back in Gaborone, over New Year, 6 of our family were invited to a dinner at the Chinese Embassy, where 6 of them entertained us. The Ambassador either cannot or will not speak English, so has an interpreter, which slows down conversation. But a visiting lady army Colonel spoke French, so she Ian and I broke the rules, and fooled the interpreter who did not parler français. The food of course was marvelous, and I cleaned up all the prawns. Quite an evening to remember.

31 October 1989 Gaborone

I'm as surprised to be here as you are! It has all happened very suddenly. Over one year ago, Ruth wrote to tell me that a young ITV film director had somehow found the story of their marriage, and wanted to film it, so I should expect to hear from him. He later wrote and asked me many questions which of course took some pondering over, relating to 40 years ago. So I decided to wait until I was here last Christmas. Ruth and I jogged each other's memories and we made a tape to send off. Well, I forgot all about it. About one month ago this director, Michael Dutfield telephoned me from here and said he would like me to come down to be filmed as part of his film. It's partly documentary, partly a filmed story. The earliest I could come was Sat. 28th, the day we were leaving, as we had MEF Board of Governors' meetings last week. My plane was an hour late; Quett Masire, President of Botswana was on the plane returning from the Commonwealth Conference, so there was a welcoming parade (headed by Ian who is now the Army Commander) and we were delayed on the plane. So I was dashed to the hotel, made up, then interviewed for an hour or so (no questions in advance); then the crew had to dash off to get their equipment and themselves on the flight. What an exciting day! Ruth is not here -she's in Europe at meetings, so I'm staying with my friends Derek and Joan Jones. My niece and nephews have been fantastic. They all met me, then collected me from the film-makers and took me out on Sunday; today Jackie had us all for my birthday lunch. So I'm most impressed.

Back to the film. It will be called 'A Marriage of Inconvenience', and will be shown on British television within 21 days of March 15, 1990! Michael has also written a book with the same title, to be released next March.⁴⁸

It seems strange being here without Ruth, but I have other friends and the week is racing by. Botswana's economy is still booming and this town is growing rapidly. I've been round the shops and can't believe how much is available. The prices are still reasonable. Everyone is wondering how things will work out in Namibia, right next door. For the time being, S. Africa is not harassing; naturally the change in the situation there is being watched closely.

28 November 1990 -Kitwe

The Khama Wedding of the Year

After being postponed from April, August was chosen as the suitable time. BUT even that was difficult. The bride was the last person to name the day -on each Saturday one of the family had an engagement, including the last weekend when SADCC [Southern African Development

⁴⁸ Michael Dutfield, *A Marriage of Inconvenience: The Persecution of Ruth and Seretse Khama*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1990.

Coordination Conference] had its tenth anniversary and they were all caught up. So it was finally fixed for 1st September in Gaborone, and the 8th in Serowe.

Traditionally in Botswana, there are 2 receptions, one given by each family. Tony and Margaret, the bride and groom, wanted a quiet wedding, in Gaborone only. They asked Ruth if they could have it on her farm, where there is an attractive summer house, which could easily double as a chapel. In Botswana the law only requires the priest to be licensed, not the building. So this was decided, and the Archbishop agreed to perform the ceremony.

I must tell you about this Archbishop, Walter Makhulu. He had been a priest in Botswana in the 1960s, and became a family friend. He then went to Britain to work, and married an Anglican deaconess, Rosemary. After that he went to work as Africa Secretary of the World Council of Churches, and when he visited Mindolo in the 1970's I met him here, and then later on visits to Geneva. So we also became friends. He was later invited to Botswana as their Bishop, and within two years he had rapid promotion as he was elected to be Archbishop of Central Africa, covering Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi. Some with good memories may remember that when I was in Gaborone for the twins 21st birthday, Walter was consecrated Bishop the next day. He is a marvelous person, good fun, excellent linguist, speaking Afrikaans, English, French and several African languages, and can imitate almost anyone.⁴⁹

Back to the wedding. Tony and Margaret were not allowed by the tribe [Bangwato] have just a quiet wedding in Gaborone, they wanted all the works in Serowe, too. So one week after the legal marriage there was a big 'do' in Serowe, with a church blessing (they insisted on the white dress) a tribal gathering in the Kgotla (as seen in the famous film 'Marriage of Inconvenience') and a lunch for one and all to follow; and a lunches for 300 specially invited guests in the TTC [Serowe Teachers' Training College] hall.

If anyone would like advice on how to conduct a wedding, there is a good team of experts available -Ruth, Ian, Jackie, the twins, and me. I arrived one week before wedding number one, and although Margaret was responsible for the reception at the farm, on behalf of her family, naturally we were involved. Margaret chose yellow and white as her colour scheme, and everything was done in those colours -plants, flowers, marquee, tablecloths, etc. We decorated all the tables with flowers, and everywhere else possible.

It was an evening wedding, 5pm was the scheduled time. So the marquee was for dinner for 50 guests. Ruth's farm is 7,000 acres, and she has about 2 acres fenced off round the homestead. The tent was just outside the fence, and Tony hired a machine to level the ground. As it hadn't rained for 6 months, we were overwhelmed with dust. That week we were arranging for both affairs, as the Serowe people could not get cutlery, crockery, in paper and plastic as well as china and steel. The President and his wife were invited, but he was at a meeting in Lusaka, so he came to the Serowe affair. Margaret's father (a widower), brother, wife and son, and an uncle and aunt, all came up the day before, and Ruth had them to dinner that evening. Margaret and her one bridesmaid stayed overnight at the farm.

Saturday turned out to be cool and dull, not at all what was ordered. So around 11am we had one of many family conferences, and decided to have the service on the verandah, which covers 2 sides of the house, which made an L shape. We seated 50 quite easily, with Walter at his table where the 2 sides met, family on one side, President's group on the other. Margaret's family had never mixed socially before with Africans, and her father spoke almost no English, so they had quite an experience.

⁴⁹ The Most Revd. Walter Paul Khotso Makhulu (1935-), Anglican Bishop of Botswana and Archbishop of Central Africa, was also a role player in clandestine operations against *apartheid* South Africa. See Paul Weinberg, *The Church's Secret Agent: Archbishop Walter Makhulu and the Fight Against Apartheid*. Oslo: The Press, 2002.

The wedding was delayed by the groom and Archbishop! The bride was bang on time. Tony was delayed at the house by visitors, and Walter had gone to Zimbabwe and got bumped off the plane. He was told another plane would come one hour later, but he could not contact Rosemary, who after going to meet him and not finding him, went back to look for another priest. Having just found one, Walter rang from the airport so she had to dash out, take him home to collect his clothes, register, licence, et. This was 3.30 when he arrived, and he got to the farm at 5.15.

After the ceremony we had toasts and cake cutting in the house, then moved to the marquee for dinner. I was lucky and sat with Walter and Rosemary, Pres. Masire's wife Gladys and her daughter, and the Minister of Defence⁵⁰ and his wife. Walter kept us all entertained, and Ruth kept sending covetous glances in our direction as she sat next to M's father and they could not converse much. But he came into his own later, as he dances old fashioned proper dances beautifully. Ruth and I took it in turns with him, while Walter danced with the white women relatives from S. Africa. He created quite an impression on everyone.

During the next week, we had our usual social round, dining with the British High Commissioner, and other friends. Ruth and Ian went to 2 State House dinners for the King of Swaziland⁵¹ and the President of Namibia,⁵² both visiting. The latter decided to visit Seretse's grave, so Ruth and Ian had to fly up with him one afternoon to Serowe. And in between we shopped.

Ruth, Ian and I drove to Serowe on the Thursday, the others came the next day. We had 3 vehicles in order to carry all the plates, cutlery, flowers, food, wedding dress, wedding cake, drinks for the luncheon, and the rest. Once there, we checked on arrangements, did more shopping, and then all day Friday helped the local friends and relatives who were decorating the church (yes, also seen in the film) and the college hall. The local ladies had made over 500 paper yellow flowers, and along with the greenery we decorated the church, including pillars, and the hall. I did 2 pillars and was quite proud, but at the end of the day I surely knew that I badly need a new spine.

The church blessing was due at 11am, but this time it was the President who was late. He flew up for the day, and brought Samora Machel's (Mozambique president who was killed in a plane crash) two daughters. (Sorry about the awful grammar). He insisted in coming to the house, even though ½ hour late, and driving past the church to get to us, so it started at 11.30. The choir also seen in the film was just as good. The church was packed, and it was a fairly short service. At the end, Pres. Quett Masire escorted me up the aisle, he is so relaxed and laid back, completely different to the normal African President. Outside the S. African press were in full force, this time the twins wore light grey morning dress. There were beautiful pictures in the paper next day.

We all drove to the kgotla ground, where tents were erected to keep us cool, as that day was very hot, and Ruth and I were delighted as our clothes were suitable for that weather. I even wore a hat. After 2 hours of speeches, singing and dances, then gift giving, we drove up the hill as far as pos. then climbed the rest to lay the bouquets on Seretse's grave (also seen in THE film). Then off to the TTC for lunch, which was fun. This lasted most of the afternoon,

⁵⁰ The Ministry of Defence, Justice and Security had not been created until several years later. This probably refers to Mompoti Merafhe, then Minister of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration, which oversaw the army and police, and his wife Bontlogele.

⁵¹ King Mswati III.

⁵² Samuel DS Nujoma. As leader of the South West People's Organisation (SWAPO), Nujoma had gone into exile by entering Botswana (then Bechuanaland Protectorate) and ultimately establishing SWAPO headquarters in Lusaka, where Nujoma and SWAPO had cordial relations with the Botswana High Commission. On Seretse Khama's attendance at meetings in Lusaka and elsewhere of the Front Line States, which Seretse helped to establish in 1976 in support of the liberation movements in southern Africa, the two often met.

and we only had brief speeches. It was nice meeting old friends again. After that we went back to the house where another party kind of happened and lasted until well after midnight.

8 October 1992 Kitwe

I was back in Botswana again in July, for 9 days, this time to be there for a ceremony of the unveiling a statue to Seretse, in Serowe, which the tribe had commissioned. Seretse's old friend, Charles Njonjo, former Attorney General of Kenya, was the guest of honour, and he came with his English wife and 2 of his 3 kids. Also invited was Mrs. Graca Machel, widow of the former President of Mozambique. I found her delightful, and very interesting. The unveiling lasted nearly 4 hours, with the usual speeches, and dancing, and singing and reciting, but we were seated in the shade, in fact it was very cold, and I was dressed up in my warmest attire. We certainly enjoyed our lunch afterwards, for about 250 people, then drove back to Gaborone. Ruth had to farm out the family for sleeping, but we all ate together in the house - all 14 of us. Great fun. We were there 2 days.

And in October I go back again. On 31st, as most of you know, I will be 70. I told the family I expected them all to come up here for the occasion, when I was there at Easter, and they agreed - some rather reluctantly. But, when I got there this time, I discovered that Margaret, Tony's wife, is pregnant, and driving to Kitwe in our hottest month at 5-6 months would be very tiring. Then while I was there Ian told me that President Masire had asked him to take him round the borders that very week. So, I did some quick thinking, and offered them a choice. After 32 years I have never visited the Okavango Delta, one of the most unusual spots in the world, where 3 rivers run into the sand, and create this delta with birdlife, fishlife, and wild animals living in this unique environment. So I told them they could take me there. They have agreed, and the lodge is already booked. One has to fly in to these lodges in small planes, in fact no lodge takes more than 24 people. So it will be a most unusual birthday, and I am sure most enjoyable.

8 May 1993 Kitwe

After flying to Gaborone and spending three days with Ruth, we met at Ruth's farm turn-off on Thursday morning, 29th October [1992]. Ruth and I in her car, with one of Ian's army drivers; Tony, Margaret and young Anthony in their car; and Ian with another driver-mechanic in his latest Land Rover. We drove to Mahalapye, about 200 kms north, and there had a coffee stop in the guest house at one of Ian's army camps. The next stop was lunch at another army camp in Francistown - a further 300 kms north. From there it was all new territory to me, as far as driving is concerned. We drove about another 400 kms to Maun, through desert, a dried-up grey landscape, very dull indeed. Our third army camp that day was our night-stop and we were spoilt and fed and entertained in comfort.

Next morning we drove to the Maun airport, which is incredibly busy, with many small planes. There are about 50 camps in the Okavango delta and most have their own airstrip. We then boarded our 2 chartered planes, 4 in each, with Ian flying one of them. The two soldier-drivers were staying in Maun for a day, then taking 2 vehicles to our second camp to await our arrival.

The first lodge, Cuxanu [Xugana?], is very luxurious. There are 6 chalets only, fairly normal for the area. We landed on a green patch, then boarded a little motor-boat to be taken round to our lodge, which is on a lagoon. I have pondered many times, wondering how I could ever describe this area. The Okavango river, from Angola and then Namibia, enters Botswana in the northwest, widens first into a pan-handle then spreads out into several big channels, and then runs into the Kalahari Sands. There are millions of little waterways, many clogged with pampas grass, so from the air one does not see so much water.

We spent two days at Cuxanu, living in luxury, going out on boats morning and afternoon, watching birds and fish. I am not a keen bird-watcher but felt I had to try and fill up my bird check-list. The guide on the boat and staff were knowledgeable, so I managed to identify about 40 species out of over 200. Of course I couldn't remember many now -the fish eagle is the easiest.

It could have been very hot, but it was cloudy and showering, so we were fortunate. My birthday, on the Saturday, was quiet in one way, but at dinner in the evening I was toasted and fussed over, and we had turkey for dinner (main course) and prawns as a starter. All the food is flown in, thus it is not a cheap holiday. Considering the problems they do fantastically well. The lodge owner, a South African who visits every month, was there, as well as visitors from Britain; the number 3 in the French embassy, and we were 8, so it was an interesting bunch.

On the Sunday we flew up to the pan-handle, where we stayed in a much more simple fishing lodge for 2 days. Totally different scenery, as we were on the river bank. The family visits this area every year and have rented a little island in the river, so we went to inspect it, and I was told of all the plans.

The day we arrived we heard that President [Joaqim] Chissano of Mozambique was coming for lunch next day. He and his wife [Marcelina] were in Botswana for the 30th anniversary celebrations of the main political party [the ruling Botswana Democratic Party], started by Seretse. He had been surprised not to see Ruth and Ian in Gaborone; so when he arrived Ian met him at the airstrip and told him the reason, resulting in my getting a very friendly birthday embrace. I sat next to his wife at lunch; she speaks little English and I spoke no Portuguese, so French came in very handy.

I must say my little great-nephew thoroughly enjoyed everything -planes, boats, strange people, different beds -no problem at all. At that time he was nearly 16 months. At this camp we were the only visitors in the main part, but there were 2 Canadian couples on the camp site, spending their winter far from home, in very sophisticated caravans.

We then returned to Maun, the boys driving round the outside of the delta, and the ladies and Anthony flying with the camp owner. This really was incredible. We were only 100 feet about [above] ground, and could see herds of Zebra, buffalo, and the odd elephant. I am still puzzled as to how they could be supported as I thought it was all water, but there are sizeable islands in between. As we approached Maun it was just as if someone had drawn a line across the ground. It suddenly went from green to greyish-brown, as we left the water behind.

Maun is an unattractive little town, as nothing grows there. It is the tourist centre of the Delta, and very busy. To me it looked as if it belonged on the moon! But there is the usual group of bush-lovers, delta-lovers, who live there, making a living out of the tourists.

We left at lunch-time, and got as far as Francistown. The memorable things for me was watching TV at breakfast, next morning announcing Clinton's incredibly easy victory.⁵³ Ruth and I stayed over to meet old friends of hers from her Serowe days in the sixties. They live in England but her parents live in Zimbabwe. It's only a short drive from Francistown to Plumtree, so we all had lunch, and then went our separate ways. I still can't believe it all happened -it's like a dream. And I must go back one day. I've read several books about the area and I had not realised it is part of the Rift Valley -a little diversion. There are frequent minor earth rumblings, and the water courses are continually shifting. Due to its difficult accessibility, it will never be over-run with tourists. Certainly a birthday to remember.

29 May 1995 Kitwe

Believe it or not, I have finally retired. My last working day was Wednesday 3rd May. On the 29th June I fly to London. I have booked a 90 day excursion so return here on 28th September,

⁵³ William Jefferson 'Bill' Clinton was elected to his first term as U.S. President on 3 November 1992.

when I shall pick up my 1 trunk and 3 suitcases from Mindolo and drive to Gaborone, or rather, I shall be driven to Livingstone and one of Ian's army drivers will collect me at the Botswana border. Kubu Lodge is conveniently near, so I'll spend a few days there waiting for him....

[Last December in Johannesburg] we were delayed...4 hours...as the Air Botswana plane wouldn't start. Instead of putting us up at the airport they went for another plane (finding another crew was the problem), so I arrived in Gaborone at midnight. Ruth was not amused! I had one day with her, then went to attend a 4 day conference representing Mindolo on -wait for it- 'Theology and Politics'. Most of the delegates were theological tutors and professors, members of the Association of Theological Institutions in Southern Africa. I thought I'd be right out of my depth. I went because Mindolo could not afford to send anyone else, and I was going to Botswana anyway. I quite enjoyed it and even felt I contributed quite adequately at times. BUT! The first tea-time I walked round the grounds to stretch my legs, and right at the end the manager's dog appeared from nowhere and bit me. I was mad! Pandemonium ensued, I was rushed to the hospital, which at 6pm on a Saturday evening was rather deserted and treated by a charming young Ethiopian woman doctor. Rabies, tetanus, dressings then 12 antibiotics a day. I had to attend hospital daily for a week, then less often.

This was a real nuisance; the conference started on the 17th, for 4 days, on the 21st went back to Ruth, on the 22nd we drove to Serowe for Christmas. So on Christmas Day I was in the Serowe hospital for rabies and dressings. Down to half the number of antibiotics but I consumed no alcohol at all over Christmas! Fortunately, this dog bit the fleshy part of my leg, but it is my left, leg, the same side as the latest hip operation, so I was limping quite badly. On our return to Gaborone on the 27th, I rang the Centre and found the dog was OK, so I didn't need the last 3 rabies shots.

29 July 1999 Gaborone

Life has been eventful again since I last wrote, but I'm not complaining. This has been -and is -a year of anniversaries. Our local Christian Council has a 4 page insert in one of the local papers, and I read in December that the final weekend of the World Council of Churches Assembly in Harare would be devoted to their golden jubilee. So at one week's notice I decided to go. I asked one of the local delegates to tell them I was coming, and off I went. As there were 4,000 attending -delegates, staff, observers, advisers, visitors, etc -I thought accommodation would be difficult so I booked into Meikles Hotel, which is 5 star, has been there since long before independence, and is still very colonial.

It started with services in the town, and I crossed the little park to the Cathedral where the Archbishop of Canterbury preached, luckily finding a seat. There was the usual tea, and I greeted the ABC, and as he shook my hand I asked him to cleanse me! Of course he was surprised. I explained that in February that year I had shaken Clinton's hand [on his visit to Mokolodi Game Reserve, south of Gaborone, where Muriel did volunteer work] and many friends were appalled, so he could remedy that! 'My dear', he said, 'I can dine out on that story for months'.

In the afternoon was the big celebration, attended by Nelson Mandela (oh yes, and [Robert] Mugabe). Dear old Madiba was his usual charming self. He opened by saying 'I am here today as a President because of missionary education. Most African Presidents would say the same. So I want to thank the churches for doing what colonial governments would never do...'

23 November 2002 Gaborone

Ruth had cancer of the gland in her neck confirmed in 2000. She had both chemotherapy and radiotherapy and her doctors were surprised at her rapid recovery. She lost all her hair, but didn't slow down very much. Then a year later, she started to get all kinds of little complaints

and fainted several times, knocking her head. She gradually got weaker. We did not go to Serowe last Christmas, because she wasn't up to it. Looking back, I wonder that I didn't realise the cancer must have come back. In February she went to Johannesburg for more radiotherapy as she had another lump in her throat. It seems obvious now that the new doctor she saw didn't realise her body couldn't take it. Her saliva dried up and she had much pain in her throat. She moved from her house 25 kms outside Gaborone, and stayed with Tony and Margaret, only 1-2 km from me, for about 2 months. Tony and Margaret had planned a holiday in Mozambique, so I moved in for 2 weeks to look after her. It was horrible -I felt so helpless. She could only take soups, yoghurt, jelly and ice cream. Nothing helped the pain. I think if she had been in a bigger town, better pain killers would have been available. I rang her doctor and asked if she was dying, and she confirmed she would only live 2-3 months.

On May 22nd she developed pneumonia and was taken to hospital (which she hated) at 7 pm in the evening. The 8 of us went to the hospital with her and sat holding her hands and shoulders, until she died at 1:30 a.m. next morning. The doctor was so caring and prayed after she died. He's a local church steward and choir member. She only weighed 40 kg.

We met, with MPs from Serowe and distant relatives, every afternoon for a week, planning local prayers held each evening on an open piece of ground between the President's and Ian's houses. They were well attended. We also planned the Cathedral Requiem Mass, with the Bishop. And the funeral itself in Serowe (Ruth was high Anglican).

It wasn't a state funeral, but you could have been fooled. The Cathedral service was very dignified except for the Press. They were an absolute pest. There were about 20 photographers at the front, behaving atrociously. I can't understand why the Bishop couldn't have told them to go. Ex-president Kaunda from Zambia came, I had a chance to have quite a long chat when we met at Ian's house beforehand. [South African president] Thabo Mbeki's wife Zanele came. I knew her as a refugee in Zambia, and was very friendly with her sister Edith, at Mindolo. I hadn't seen her for 30 years, but we had a chance to talk. The Queen Mother of Lesotho came, and Nicky Oppenheimer of Anglo-American from Johannesburg. My cousins George and Pam came from England. We all had lunch with Ian, then flew with the coffin to Serowe. There, there was another Church service, this time LMS (London Missionary Society but remained United Congregational Church of Southern Africa). Back to the house - 14 of us -the others staying with friends. The next morning -1st June -it rained for 2 hours - quite unexpected -so the funeral was delayed. We sat in the Boma for 4 hours, listening to 2 speeches in English and 7 in Tswana. Quite a strain. Then we all went up the steep hill to the Khama burial ground. Yet another service! And more speeches. I was quite proud of the fact that I managed to walk up that hill -with some help, of course. The tribe had arranged lunch for 20,000 -many people had donated cattle.

Fortunately after we got home about 4pm the rest of the day was uneventful. We stayed the night again and flew back next morning. President [Festus] Mogae⁵⁴ attended all the prayer services, cathedral and funeral [Ian Khama was his vice president from 1998 to 2008 when he became president]. Unlike many African Presidents, he seemed quite relaxed at taking a minor role....

A local company had made a video of Seretse and Ruth's life. It was finished just in time, Ruth saw it, but I don't know how much she registered. There was a launch 2 days before I went to England. Quite a social occasion -dinner at a local hotel, Kaunda came to speak about Seretse, and I spoke about Ruth. I sat at dinner between Kaunda and Mogae -it won't happen again! During dinner, KK got up and announced to Mogae 'I want to dance with Muriel!' Well it wasn't a dinner dance! When I tried to get out of it, Mogae said, 'You can't refuse your president'. I never have been much of a dancer, but I did my best.

⁵⁴ President of Botswana, 1998-2008.

I had planned to visit Britain this year, but Ruth's illness made it impossible to make plans. So after she died, I booked to fly on 12th July. Ian gave me his air miles to fly 1st Class, which was super. I slept for 6 hours and particularly enjoyed being able to go through an immigration desk for 1st class with no queues.