



P. O. Box 1038,  
Johannesburg,  
South Africa.

November, 1959.

Dear Friends,

It has been 5 years since I sat down to write a Christmas news letter. A lot of bridges have been crossed since then, and several oceans; but we are still in South Africa and are looking forward to our fifth Christmas in Johannesburg.

Things are still much the same here, but we don't see things as vividly as we used to. We don't look up when an African woman with ankles and wrists weighted down with copper bracelets walks past, or a Zulu maiden with babe on back and exotic head-dress passes. Nor do we pay much attention to the thousands of civilized Africans in every walk of life. We are aware, yes, but not startled. We still live in our own "white" world - as you probably know "apartheid" is a law here, though we have African delivery boys, washer-women and servants. And of course they are employed in every phase of business imaginable.

We are used to the British accent now and our children speak like all their South African playmates, though they are still staunch Americans at heart.

We still think the best way to spend our vacations in South Africa is to visit the Kruger National Park, the huge natural game reserve here. South Africa has a beautiful coastline and many fashionable resorts. Cape Town is beautiful, Durban tropical, the Drakensburg Mountains stupendous. We have travelled many miles in southern Africa, but our most pleasant times have been spent in the game reserve. One gets a special feeling there that is indescribable....though scenery is rather monotonous, the rest huts a minimum of comfort, it is usually hot, one can drive for miles without seeing much....but the sight of a lone giraffe wipes away the heat, an elephant lumbering down the road quickly cools one (with chills) - the stately kudu brings out the camera and the homely wart hog brings good humour as his tail pops straight up at the sight of you and he disappears in the bush. The rather bleak, dark, mud rondavel with the whole family packed in one room turns into a de luxe suite as the moon creeps up, and the cool night breezes bring the sounds of the wild creatures in the forest. And the greatest thrill of all is the knowledge that one man, Paul Kruger, many years ago had the foresight to dream of this park. When Africa was still teeming with game he saw a need and worked for it. Other men took his place and today it is THE only place in South Africa, with the exception of Hluhluwe and Gemsbok Game Reserves where there are any animals to speak of.

Bob and I are getting used to winter being in July and we happily address our Christmas cards in summer. In fact, as I write this I am thinking I will have a

dip in our neighbors' swimming pool as soon as I finish this page.

Home doesn't even seem as far away as it used to. We can get to New York City now in 33½ hours, though I must say we prefer to do it the slow way and see something new on the way to the good ole U.S.A. Our first trip home we went by ship to Rio de Janeiro and spent a month travelling through South and Central America to Texas. Of course Bob was visiting labs along the way, but we just rode along in his "coat pocket", so to speak, and had a glorious time seeing the sights. When we finally landed in Houston, our first U.S. soil, we stopped in amazement to hear the American (Texas) accent. You can't imagine what it is like to hear the Queen's English spoken almost entirely for two years and suddenly land in Texas. We gaped! And I was embarrassed to be teased about my speech - for enunciating my words clearly, I guess - but honestly, if one doesn't, one can't be understood here.

On our return to the Union we travelled the Polar route from Los Angeles to Copenhagen (by air). Last year we were lucky enough to see the World's Fair in Brussels and a bit of England before boarding the Queen Mary homeward.

We had the most wonderful time seeing many friends and relatives in the States again, and best of all we were able to persuade my parents to return to South Africa with us. You can imagine what a thrill it was for us to have them accompany us. On our return to S.A. we saw Lisbon, Rome and Athens plus side trips from each of those cities into interesting parts of the country; and finally on to Johannesburg to have Mother and Daddy with us for nearly six months.

The worst homesickness I have ever felt was when I watched their plane soar into the air as they left us last April. The only consolation was that they were having an exciting time stopping in Livingstone, Northern Rhodesia, where they saw the majestic "smoke that thunders", Victoria Falls, and London where they got to see more of England than we've had opportunity to, and even a bit of Scotland.

We've been very lucky with our overseas visitors. Two years ago this Christmas we had our good friends from Houston, George and Ethel Dumbauld, with us for three weeks. When this happens the miles to American shores drop off rapidly. I must say that your many letters also shorten the distance tremendously!

To catch up on family news: most of you know we have a 2½ year-old son named Walter; and a 9 year-old daughter, Jan, and 7 year-old Peggy. And how the two girls cling to everything American. They are both extremely proud to be from the United States. And how they loved their short (6 weeks) time in the American schools last year. They hardly know a thing about typical American celebrations such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Valentine's Day though we try to celebrate them in our own little way. But of course they are learning about special South African and British holidays that mean so much here.

They miss television (so do we, but we all read a lot more than we would at home); yet there are such amenities here as The Children's Theatre where every year plays are presented by well known artists. Children's symphony concerts are frequently given, not to mention an extremely heavy concert season which we too have opportunity to enjoy. (Well known American as well as European artists come here). Johannesburg has five "live" theatres and of course numerous moving picture houses. South Africans are great movie fans. Jan and Peggy have ballet lessons, and Jan studies piano. In fact we find it is a common thing here for childrens' afternoons to be crowded with all kinds of lessons; speech, art, swimming, tennis, etc., much as they would be in America.

I have just pointed out some of these things to give you an idea of the similarity of the way of life between the two countries.

On the other hand we have just been practicing the Star Spangled Banner so the children won't forget it. The only words they know to the tune of "America" are "God Save the Queen". Despite their ignorance we are glad that they have the opportunity to see how the "other half" live. We are glad that when they

grow up they will have a better understanding of their fellow man. I hope that they will appreciate the fact that every country has something of which to be proud and even though its peoples might speak a different language from us, or have different customs, or a color other than white, one doesn't judge them because of that, but rather appreciates these differences and learns from them.

Sometimes we lament that our children are not having a true American upbringing. We ask ourselves, "Are we fair to drag them half way around the world?" I am sure that many of you wonder what "those Kokernots" are doing. "What will happen to those children?" Granted, I wonder too. Jan and Peggy don't even know how to play cowboys and Indians even though Bob bought them cap pistols. They have a most peculiar way of expressing themselves; jersey for sweater, cotton reel for spool of thread, bathing costume for bathing suit, lorry for truck, truck for freight car, brookies for panties. They bath, not bathe; they have fringes, not bangs; they go swimming in a swimming bath, not pool; they have break at school, not recess; they go on holiday, not vacation; some of their friends live in flats, not apartments; they ride in a lift, not an elevator; they play in a garden, not yard; they go to the bioscope or cinema, not movies; an airplane is an aeroplane; the record player is a gramophone; the combination radio-record player is a radiogram; peanuts are ground nuts or monkey nuts; they are in Grade 1 and Standard 1 at school, not 1st grade and 3rd grade; they have a head master, not principal; they ride the tram, not street car; babies ride in prams, not buggys; babies wear napkins, not diapers; at the table we use serviettes, not napkins; bicycles are two-wheelers; in spelling, "z" is pronounced "zed"; and if we live here long enough the children will matriculate (if they are lucky for the examination is very difficult) instead of "graduating" from high school, and so it goes.

Anyhow, they do translate to their bewildered parents.

Yes, they miss a lot of good old American upbringing, but we have the consolation that they are learning a lot too. Before they grow up they will have seen where a lot of history was made and where great literature and art have been conceived. Mostly European. They have already worshipped in many different churches. They have gone to school with children of many different faiths and should therefore be more tolerant. In the public schools it is amazing how religious instruction is included in the curriculum without stepping on anybody's toes. The children always have morning prayers and the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd psalm are recited by all from grade 1 up. The classes also say "grace" before having their "tea-time". A Bible story is read or told several times a week. This is done in classes that are at least one half Jewish with Protestants and Catholics as well, yet I have never heard a complaint. On the other hand, the children are given a good grounding in science including the story of evolution which is told very simply and matter-of-factly in their history lesson.

One thing we would like to do on our next home leave is to visit famous American landmarks so the children can get a good beginning in the American History they will soon be learning. Believe me, they are rusty! Even with our coaching Jan and Peggy would never think to tell anyone they are from Texas, but rather "America". The capital of the United States is Washington, D.C. - that they are sure of - but 50 states - 50 state capitols - no - that just doesn't register yet. They know Texas, California, and New York exist, and they have read enough news to know about Alaska (darn it) and Hawaii. Peggy is quite sure that George Washington is still President though, so you see why we must take that little trip. And they've just got to see some real "Red Indians" as they are called here (hope they are not disappointed). I must say, they were surely unhappy about the Texas cowboys they saw when we were home last year....they naturally expected to see Gene Autrey and Roy Rogers on every corner with a six shooter and "Silver". To sum it up, we wouldn't trade those American passports for any in the world, and we want our children to grow up knowing the reason why.

It is only fair to add that this travel business is just a by-product of the real reason we are here. Bob is still with The Rockefeller Foundation doing virus research on insect-borne virus diseases (now there's a mouthfull!) Just don't let him ever corner you or you will know all about why he likes this work

so much - he eats, sleeps, breathes viruses. Besides his interesting work here in the Union of South Africa, Bob had a 5,000 mile journey by Jeep two years ago into Portuguese East Africa, and this year a 3,000 mile (4-wheel-drive at 10 miles an hour in many stretches) trip into Bechuanaland and the Caprivi Strip. (Find those on your African map). His experiences could fill a book which is what I'm trying to get him to do so won't go into it at all in this letter.

Now for those of you who may not know, let me remind you that we "ain't so isolated, folks". Am sure some of you have in mind the poor sacrificing Kokernots in Darkest Africa. Well, even if we are 10,000 miles away by air, South Africa, other than for its racial problem, is so much like home that we hardly notice we are in a different country. But I wouldn't dream of giving you a verbal travelogue. I've written too much already. But if you are interested you can look it up in your encyclopedia or write the South African Tourist Association in New York City (advertised in Holiday regularly). And too, (this is an afterthought) there are over 500 American families living in Johannesburg, and the Reef (surrounding country) alone. Of course that doesn't make much of a dent in its 1,000,000 population, but the American Club is very active here.

Don't know where we'll be writing from next year, but we will be here for sure until next November - so do write! I'll give the postman a cup of coffee (he'll demand tea) if all your newsy letters arrive at once. Really, you can't imagine how we do love to hear from each of you.

And do have a Merry Merry Christmas and all the Kokernots send you their very best wishes for a Happy New Year!