

19 March 1994

Dear Phyllis

We've been getting a lot of stories in the paper lately about S.A. Headlines read: "Bophuthatswana Will Boycott S. Africa Vote"; "Black Homeland Regime Near Collapse,"; "Executions Underscore Bophuthatswana Chaos; and "S. Africa Police Armed Inkatha, Panel Finds." I was so glad to read of the fall of the puppet Mangope; I hate frauds, in any field of endeavor. Now to see that other fraud, Buthelezi, exposed and humbled. This latest Goldstone report on covert arming and training of Inkatha should damage his credibility, don't you think? First Inkathagate in '91, now this. After the election I hope the guy ends up (a) in jail for sending out hit squads or, if sufficient evidence is lacking to convict him, (b) reduced to the level of private citizen with no office and no power.

The news from this end is, I got sick. I got labyrinthitis, an ailment of the inner ear that causes dizziness and nausea. I got up one morning and I had vertigo, bad. I had no idea what happened to my balance, I was lurching around the room, it was scary. I staggered to a neighbor, who drove me to the hospital. From Thursday night to Sunday morning, I couldn't eat, drink, stand or even sit up in bed, it was like being really seasick for days on end, I didn't care if I lived or died! Then I got better, once I got my appetite back, I didn't mind the dizziness so much. After a while I was able to ride my bike again, important as I have no car. At this point, I have very little dizziness, I can do everything I could do before I got sick. I wouldn't wish that labyrinthitis on my worst enemy, I wouldn't wish it on a dog. One thing, though. It gave me empathy for old people and sick people and people who can't walk, etc. Before this, I never had a clue what they go through, just to perform the simplest task, like walking across a room...

Speaking of health, I hope you're better. Your last letter said no curry. NO CURRY? I hope now you're able to eat. Believe me, I know how it feels to be sick in the guts. The only good thing about it, you lose weight, but what a way to do it...

Can't seem to escape the subject of health. Tomorrow my dad is moving into some kind a convalescent apartment, because he's no longer able to care for himself. My brother Greg offered to take him in, but dad doesn't want to be a burden. Also, in the convalescent apartment, he'll be safer as there will be someone around 24 hours a day, in case he falls down, which he is prone to do. Greg and I are gonna go help him move his stuff with a pickup truck--you know, a bakkie.

One last note: Monday is Oscar night. Everybody says "Schindler's List" will get best movie. I saw it and it's overrated! Must be a case of political correctness...I vote for a thriller, "The Fugitive."

Love,

Jimbo

Recd.
7/4/94

21 January 1994

Dear Phyllis and Sukhthi _____

Drought, floods, riots, fires, now the earthquake, what's next? Mind you, I'm not complaining, I like a bit of anarchy here and there. Like most things, the earthquake story was overrated. Mostly it just scared the hell out of everybody, and a lot of plates and stuff fell off shelves and got broken--big deal! Okay, about 50 people died, but 50 out of the millions who live here...I'll take those odds. But the fear that people feel is real, it runs deep, like the fault lines in the earth's crust. I think it's the aftershocks that have been nagging at us since the main quake on Monday--they keep coming and they keep people on edge. At bottom you find the fear of the Big One. The Big One is a term that people use here all the time, it comes up in casual conversations again and again, it's always in back of everybody's mind, even when there hasn't been an earthquake for years. A newcomer might wonder, "Big one? Big what?" But everybody here knows it has only one meaning--the huge, cataclysmic earthquake along the San Andreas Fault that seismologists have been predicting for years, an earthquake powerful enough to collapse buildings, not just crack them; powerful enough to kill thousands, not just 50; powerful enough to drop a sizable chunk of California into the Pacific Ocean, and create new beachfront property in areas that are now inland farmland. Over the years the Big One has taken on mythic proportions, people think of it as the end of the world and a divine punishment for our sins, etc. What we just had was pretty bad, but everyone agrees it wasn't the Big One, so we've still got that hanging over us, and that's one reason for the anxiety that's so strong now...when the quake hit Monday at 4:30 a.m., I happened to be awake, so I got to experience the full effect. Most people were asleep, which is scarier. You come into consciousness knowing something is going wrong, but for a moment you don't know what it is. The quake was about as strong as I can deal with, anything stronger would probably scare me too much. I've always found earthquakes exciting, but I have my limits. Talking to people, I see the fear they have and it's no joke. Being anal retentive, I've always been into earthquake preparedness. There's one in every neighborhood, the guy who's totally prepared, has every item that's recommended by the Red Cross. Well, I'm one of those guys. Everything in my small apartment is well anchored and secured, etc. So I had no damage in my place, except my wall furnace broke, and it gets a little cold in my apartment, but that's a minor inconvenience, nothing more...Basically, I got to play savior to my neighbors, handing out bottled drinking water and torches with batteries (which of course they don't keep in their homes, even though they've been warned a million times through various mass media), testing for gas leaks and structural damage, passing on information from the battery-operated radio, etc. The quake left me feeling smug,

vindicated, because some idiots had actually made fun of me for all my preparations--ha! I got the last laugh on them! I told one of them, "I told you so. You wouldn't listen to me, now look what's happened." He was a good sport, he said, "Jimbo, I take back everything I said. I'll never doubt you again." A couple of odd facts...the quake raised the San Gabriel Mountains two feet...power outages were caused as far north as Canada...some old people got so shook up, they croaked from heart attacks...one huge three-storey apartment building got lifted completely off its foundation; it rose in the air and when it came down, it "pancaked"--the ground floor apartments and all the people in them got squished. When the dust settled, it was suddenly a two-storey building. It landed more or less level, it didn't look that bad until you realized that there was a flattened storey underneath it all...natural gas pipes under the streets were ripped open, causing flames to rise out of the asphalt, high into the sky, seemingly burning for no reason. This caught some houses on fire and burnt them down...the home of my friends Michael and Loretta looked like a hurricane had gone through it, furniture and books and food and lamps and wall hangings, etc., all over the floor, wall to wall broken stuff--their toilet got ripped out of the floor, the heavy bolts holding it down were just yanked out like toothpicks or something. The thing weighed between 50 and 100 pounds and it got tossed all the way across the bathroom like it was nothing, we found it in pieces...we have a lot of immigrants from other earthquake-prone countries in this town, a lot of Armenians and Guatemalans, Mexicans, etc., who came here after going through major earthquake disasters in their home countries. Some of them really lost their cool in this one, they were throwing their belongings into their cars and trying to get away. Futile--half the freeways out of town fell apart, and anyway, there's no place in California that's immune from earthquakes. Where they come from, it's common for people to get buried under collapsing buildings, usually unreinforced masonry, so for the past week they've been camping out in their front yards, they're afraid to go back inside their homes, even homes that came through this quake with no damage...a lot people of all nationalities are wondering if they shouldn't go back to their home countries before the Big One hits...not me, though. I'm a hometown boy, so I'm hangin' in here, come hell or high water.

Sukhthi, send me your mailing address in Harare, or if you are not permanent there, maybe it's better to send to you via Phyllis, as I'm doing with this one?

Phyllis, how is your health? Better I hope, and able to move your neck...I'm taking the bold step of sending this to your Umbilo Road address, instead of the Qualbert P.O. box. Put my mind at ease, would you, and acknowledge receipt of this letter in your next?

Love to you both —
Jimbo