

Appendix 17

Letters from Yvonne home from Africa

Two letters home from Yvonne in late 1945

On Board

[Date must be before Aug 1945 but must likely after VE day in May 1945. Neil had sail out to Sierra Leone on 25 Feb 1944, listed on the boat as a “Trader”]

Hello Family

As you know I can say nothing of interest – these mere personal jottings will have to suffice. Felt pretty grim when the train pulled out.. and have to confess my eyes were somewhat misty. Do hope you will be able to view this merely as a long holiday and keep your eyes fixed on the goal of September – it certainly seems a hazy dream at the moment but I am convinced it will come to pass.

My train arrived 1¾ hours late and therefore very little time in which to feel lost. Had an amazingly easy time as regards censorship and have to admit most of my fears were ungrounded: it seems my instructions were outdated and do not now apply. The journey was certainly the most comfortable long distance one – even so I slept only about 2 hours.

There is practically nothing on which to spend money – particularly as cigs are 1/8 for 50 !! Was disappointed to find spirits etc are unobtainable but delighted to find lavish supplies of iced tomato juice – my first since mumps. Food is definitely good. Sample Breakfast: porridge, bacon and egg, fish, marmalade and coffee. This morning our hardy passenger ate the following : porridge, small portion of smoked cod steak and onions, rolls and marmalade and coffee! Lunch in four courses, ditto dinner. Have decided to cut down on some courses or I shall roll into my new home! Sad to tell breakfast is at 8.30 and as we

are somewhat overcrowded it means rising at 7 in order to get the morning ablutions completed – altho’ in turn one can ‘????’ at 7.45 .. each making the early effort at different times.

Have experienced lifeboat drill – quite gruesome but of course very necessary. Carry a special torch and a tin of vitamin chocolate attached to the “mae west” which is used in case of emergency. This of course has to be carried from place to place, wherever one goes. Shades of London bombing when the signals are relayed by Tannoy. A very fine “Achtung” services - Have stable companions who have been travelling back and forth for 10 or 12 years and they say wives usually stay over 12 months – altho’ they may of course stay all the time if they like. They have houses in England and children whom they send to boarding school when at school age – otherwise they too “globe trot”. It appears that local production has not been encouraged but lately in wartime with the danger of travelling they have been more helpful and several Europeans have produced. They see no reason why I should dislike the place and flatly deny the old wives tales about it.

I must write a few odd spots of news to Toto so shall not exhaust all the information I have gleaned in this first letter.

Oh there is one thing I must say – there is an adorable ginger kitten aboard – the darlinest thing – very fluffy with violet eyes and only about 6 weeks old. Terribly frightened of the deck and squeals to high heaven if he’s cold ! Everyone thinks there is murder being done. I must try to see him every day – he reminds me of Claudette... my adorable kitten. How is she? And did she forgive me without saying goodbye? Kiss her for me and tell her I shall (see) lots of much prettier babies whilst I am away. !! I understand it’s not at all impossible to keep a dog if one can tend

it properly – and one resident there keeps a mongoose and adores it.

Shall write again when I arrive and will faithfully keep up a supply of letters to at least 18 people! But it seems hardly worthwhile writing anymore from the boat as they will be so delayed.

Give my love to everyone and say I shall write as soon as possible.

My thoughts are with you and the more I learn of my future the easier I think it will be for us to be together again.

All my love Yvonne.

Would you please give enclosed to Dorothy.

From Yvonne

c/o AC Ltd, Freetown, Sierra Leone . B.W.A

10th Aug 1945

Dear Mrs Guise

It has occurred to me that I haven't scribed a line to you but rather thought that any news or information I sent home would be passed- on to you - no doubt that is, the case so I won't go over it all again.

As you see am still happily bashing a typewriter – helps to swell the budget to the tune of £18 a month - and .in any case I'm bound to my agreement with the Coy. that I would fulfil the job for-which I was granted a passage find life terrifically expensive here -mere food is often twice-the-price at home and altho' drinks are cheaper (14/- whisky for instance; one drinks such a lot, by having two or three every evening & sherry for dinner at night etc. However - far be it from me to grumble because we do certainly live on a far better scale than we could at home on the same money. It's a useful experience to be here - not entirely happy and successful from my point of view & work is

quite crushing for all the male staff. N. works daily from 7-30 to 12; 1-30 to 5 ... and more often than not until 6 .. Sat. he allows himself 2hrs for lunch instead of 1½ & on-Sunday only half day - but even -so that is far more than one - would do at home. However, monetary considerations do compensate. Conditions of work are -worse in Fr.Tn than in any other Colony, and opportunities to be entertained in leisure hours are home-made or nil. There are service cinemas but it is only "by kind permission" that one goes to them, accompanied by a member of the forces. Of course everyone is mad about Bridge - which as, you possibly know I don't play - loathing cards as I do - then there is golf at Lumley & bathing .. but not now in the rainy season ... seas are too hectic (good surf-riding in fine weather; & in any case its no fun to bathe in torrential downpours. Am meeting a lot of interesting' types - lots of Far East Shell people, Railway officials ... all sorts Definitely feel the "small boy" at the moment having left shores before and therefore without experience. In addition, I have lived a fortunate, or unfortunate, life - depending on which way you view living a "sheltered" life (as I was so often told)... not leaving the bosom of the family & finding my best amusements there ... here of course I am obliged to meet new people continually & train myself to develop some sort of friendship with them - short lived because they usually go oh leave, transfer or something like that. But in spite of all I feel lucky in having this opportunity to develop my knowledge of people and places.

Mater, Marie & I exchange letters frequently - heard about the "soiree" at your flat how well the flat looks now felt quite a pang of nostalgia to be back among the old circle am looking forward to coming home already. - am pleasantly surprised to hear from Marie that she finds Raoul "amusing" think I should too ... definitely sounds the kind of brat I could tolerate - and would certainly educate any child of mine in the same way ... there are some children here who thrive wonderfully and are

correctly trained - but there was one on the other hand who was utterly spoilt to compensate for the heat, for not seeing other children and for having to take vile quinine in liquid form because he was 4 and too young to swallow- the pill; properly fond Momma and Dadda felt he was "suffering" and should be spoilt a little - but it wasn't a little! On one occasion he took their sweet white puss-cat and threw it against the frig! - The Mother did react on this occasion and threatened to throw him against the frig - picked him up with this view in mind ... but otherwise they couldn't go out to any amusements because altho' they could leave him in competent hands - and with a woman he liked ... he would scream like 7 devils if he knew she had gone out...N would be very pleased if we were blessed similarly ... thou' at the moment it appears that I'm not that kind of a girl! It doesn't worry me in the least - the only reason why I ever contemplated having one was to get it over her before I was old - but now should take a very poor view if I came home "that way" from my first exciting leave.

So sorry to hear Mary had to go back to the San. Was it her fault ... inasmuch as she didn't observe the (I hear) strict rules about living ... taking exercise and air for instance ... but it must be a crushing blow to go back again - have they given up the top flat? ... we spend hours tossing up whether we'll ..stay in a hotel; with either of the parents; have a furnished flat; unfurnished- all proposals hold some snags.. we haven't decided yet but will possibly choose the cheapest one with the most comfort, in order to enjoy every minute of home surroundings! .

Are you using Peter's car? wish we-had it out her. We've got one but like everything else in Freetown its falling to pieces and there are not spare parts to repair it ... supplies of all the luxuries of life ... apart from normal food and drinks are about as shot as in England – no elastic and only one shop with black lace, no electric irons or any equipment like that - no cooking utensils in

the way of cake tins, poached-egg frypans or cheese grater - the cook made a grater from a tin lid with holes poked by a nail - quite satisfactory but fortunately Marie sent me a beauty - it's the pride' & joy of his life. He's a very good cook - but they are swines for thieving take potatoes, onions, (impossible to get most of the time but now and again a ship calls and, knowing the captains of our ships, they dash the company a few lbs ahead and we thrive for a few weeks. – then another shortage) milk, candles, tea - almost anything ... and 2 fishes together weighing 1 lb (pretty big you gather) will produce a small fillet for lunch, and, a smaller one for the fish course at dinner – the rest having gone into their rice stew pot ... if one undertook to feed them it would be different – but they persist that Blackman no eat white man chop so you expect, them to cater for themselves – mostly out of your store cupboard, as it happens. Oh the end .. I shall have to end abruptly ...should like to hear from you and I'll scribe back anything you want to hear about. .. love to yourself and young Mr. Guise and to the Cat ... you've got one of course. And I am about to have another gorgeous kitten ... had 2 before but as you may have heard – one was eaten by the night watchman – the cannibal
Yvonne

Comments

1. N referred to is Neil Callow. Yvonne and Neil got married in Jun 1942, just before Joan and Tony. Their first born, Gabriele, born in April 1946 died within a few months
2. Mary lived in the flat above or below Stanthorpe Road and feel out with Joan a few year after she moved to Chiswick by returning a Christmas present of a tin of biscuits. Joan explained to me that she had been treated with Streptomycin and it had reacted by making her deaf and as a consequence she became paranoid.