

Till the time of Trial

The prison letters of Simon Nkoli

G.P.-S. (F-1) **OFFICIAL—AMPTELIK** G 316

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1985-05-04
BENONI

AAN TO Mr Roy Shepherd
115 A Doran Street
Belgravia
2094

1100F VAN DIE GEVANGENIS
1985-05-02-
MODDERBEE
HEAD OF THE PRISON

VOU OP STIPPELLENE VANAF 1 TOT 3—FOLD ON DOTTED LINES FROM 1 TO 3

NAAM EN ADRES VAN AFSENDER—SENDER'S NAME AND ADDRESS

Simon Nkoli (H/18/85)
Modderbee Prison
Private Bag X1045
Benoni 1600

INSLUITTINGS WORD NIE TOEGELAAT NIE—ENCLOSURES ARE NOT PERMITTED

2
BEGIN HIER SKRYF—START WRITING HERE

Dedicated to Roy Shepherd
and the memory of Simon Tseko Nkoli

Keeping the records of something historic

When the Gay and Lesbian Archives were established in 1997, it was one year after the adoption of the new Constitution and the sexual orientation clause. It was a time to look back and recognise that something historic had taken place. South Africa had become a model for the world, and the records of how we did it seemed worth keeping. Everyone liked the idea of a gay and lesbian archive. I had tons of stuff stored away in boxes in my house and I knew that others also did. All of this was in danger of being lost.

At first, a few items were put in the South African History Archive, which had been established to collect and preserve struggle material – some t-shirts, some recorded interviews, and some organisational records. Then a grant freed me up to work on the project full-time. A flood of material came in as I relieved organisations of their records, and individuals of their dusty boxes, magazines and videos, letters and photographs. There was no way to keep up with the formal archival processing, but we decided that could wait. The most important thing then was to collect.

I was thrilled when Roy Shepherd showed me what was in a suitcase that he kept in his flat – photos, Simon's letters, other material from the Delmas treason trial. But the letters were particularly vivid – “My darling Roy” contrasting with the red-inked bureaucracy of the prison censor's stamp. They are just the kind of document that inspired my passion for the archives.

It gives me pleasure to remember that at the event where Roy officially handed the collection over to GALA, Simon was there.

Graeme Reid
GALA founder

Ten years of Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action

2007 is the tenth anniversary of GALA, now called Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action. Now that the archives' collections are well established, GALA contributes to the development of a human rights democracy in South Africa by sharing its information on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) lives with LGBT people and with the general public. Through exhibitions, films, books, comics and other methods, we celebrate LGBT lives, build Pride in the LGBT community, and teach the importance of respecting difference. Our goal is to help make the rights that are guaranteed in our Constitution real for LGBT people.

This booklet is the first in a series on LGBT history. We chose as its subject Simon Nkoli and the letters he wrote from prison for many reasons. The letters form one of the earliest and most important collections at GALA. Simon is South Africa's most well-loved LGBT rights activist. And he stands so powerfully for the idea that human rights cannot be separated. As Simon said in 1990, shortly after he'd been acquitted on charges of treason against the apartheid state:

“In South Africa I am oppressed because I am a black man, and I am oppressed because I am gay. So when I fight for my freedom I must fight against both oppressions.”

May *Till the time of Trial* contribute to protecting and growing our hard-won and often fragile freedom.

Ruth Morgan
GALA director

Simon Nkoli's prison letters to Roy Shepherd

The Delmas treason trial

On 3 September 1984, police teargassed a protest march in Sebokeng township and shot at the marchers, killing about twenty. At the funeral on 23 September, police surrounded the cemetery and arrested many people, Simon Tseko Nkoli among them.

Simon was in detention for nine months before the state formally laid charges in June 1985. He and most of his 21 co-trialists were associated with the United Democratic Front, an anti-apartheid grouping of grassroots and community organisations.

The main charge was treason. The prosecution was trying to prove that the UDF intended to overthrow the state by violence, independently or in conspiracy with the banned African National Congress. These were serious charges, which potentially carried the death penalty.

It would take another two years before Simon was released on bail. And another year and a half before he was given a suspended sentence, with severe restrictions on his rights to freedom of speech and association.

Yet another year went by before the entire trial was declared invalid by the appeals court and Simon and the others were acquitted of all the charges against them.

The trial was known as the Delmas treason trial, because the state ordered that it take place in Delmas, a small town more than an hour's drive from Johannesburg. In Delmas there would be less likelihood of big demonstrations in support of the trialists.

It became one of the longest running political trials in South Africa — 420 days in court. It was the most high-profile of several such trials that took place at the time, because there were key UDF office-bearers among the accused, in particular Mosiuoa “Terror” Lekota and Popo Molefe. Other trialists mentioned by Simon in the letters are Gcina Malindi, John Mokoena (whom Simon calls “Johny”), Simon Vilakazi, Ephraim Ramakgula, Jacob Hlanyane or “Jakes”, David Mphuthi, Jerry Tlhopane, Lazarus More, and Bavumile Vilakazi, who was the defence's first witness to testify.

The defence team included advocate George Bizos, who had represented Nelson Mandela and others in the Rivonia Trial of 1963-1964, and appeared



Simon Tseko Nkoli in the early 1980s

at the inquest into Steve Biko's death in 1977. Other members of the legal team mentioned by Simon in the letters are Zak Yacoob, Priscilla Jana, and Caroline Heaton-Nicholls.

Heaton-Nicholls was a junior lawyer at the time. She gave Simon a lot of personal support, and later married Simon's close friend and co-trialist, Gcina Malindi.

The 1980s

Twenty years later it can be hard to imagine the repression and the violence of the 1980s. A great groundswell of popular resistance came up against the apartheid state's increasing repression.

The UDF had been launched in August 1983 in response to the white government's attempts to "reform" apartheid without making any real changes to black South Africans' rights and lives. The UDF drew together groups representing women, the youth, churches, labour and communities, and organised them to resist and replace local elements of the apartheid system, such as illegitimate town councils.

Township residents organised rent and schools boycotts, which sometimes became violent. A heavy police presence often acted as provocation. People who were seen to be collaborators with the apartheid system were sometimes attacked and killed, and the ANC was claiming responsibility for serious acts of sabotage. The South African Defence Force was not only active in Angola and Namibia, but also in the townships alongside the police.

Stricter and stricter laws were created by the apartheid state, taking away people's rights to hold public meetings. The rights of the media to report on political activities were heavily restricted, and many activists were banned from being quoted at all. Laws of arrest and detention gave the police the power to hold detainees for longer and longer periods of time. Children as young as nine years old were detained.

In the letters, Simon refers to the DPSC – the Detainee Parents Support Committee. This organisation gave wide support to detainees and their families, including searching for people who had gone missing, transporting visitors to prisons, buying clothes and food parcels for prisoners, gathering and publishing statistics on detainees, and lobbying the international community.

The letters

For the four years he was in prison, in between tough preparations for the trial and attending the long hearings, Simon wrote letter after letter, sometimes several in a day, and some over several days. They were to friends, comrades, and later to his supporters overseas. They helped to sustain him while his life was on hold – perhaps even on the line.

Simon's letters to Roy Shepherd, his lover at the time of his arrest, are the core of his enormous correspondence, held at GALA.

Out of hundreds of pages of letters, the editors have extracted and adapted segments which tell not only the big story of a South African hero, but also give the details of his humanity. We use ellipses (...) to indicate where we have left out large pieces of text, but have not indicated where we have removed just a few words. We have corrected spelling, grammar and punctuation where that makes reading easier, but Simon's mistakes and idiosyncrasies are part of his unique style and charm. Simon was aware of himself as a writer, and comments often not only on his English, but also on his handwriting – even as he complains about Roy's ("I did receive your long letter, though I struggled for ages to get your handwriting. Gee, it is getting wild indeed. Do you think you can try to improve it? Just a little bit").

This selection from his letters to Roy shows Simon grappling with being on trial and the challenges of living in prison – in particular with being gay in these circumstances. The extracts we have chosen show Simon's political positions as well as his deep personal needs. They reveal his taste for romantic novels and pop songs, and his almost daily anxieties about what to wear.

Simon requested, and read, several books by the romance novelist Danielle Steel (*Season of Passion* is mentioned in these extracts). South African and international supporters sent him other sorts of books as well, and he records in the letters having read *The Trial* by Franz Kafka ("It is so sad at the end. Poor K was hanged for the crime he never knew"), *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French, *The Persian Boy* by Mary Renault, *The Boys on the Rock* by John Fox, *Another Country* by James Baldwin, and *Kiss of the Spider Woman* by Manuel Puig, among others. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is set in an Argentine prison, and stages the encounters of a gay man, incarcerated for sexual activities, and a political activist. It is hard not to see Simon as a reconciliation of these two figures.

Simon dreamed of being a published writer himself, and wrote fictional and autobiographical stories as well as his letters.

He also relied on music to keep his spirits up. He listened to the radio and

to cassettes that he had been sent. He requested, among others, music by Jennifer Rush, Peter Tosh, Grace Jones, and Gladys Knight and the Pips.

His clothing was a great and ongoing concern for him, especially when he was to appear in court. He had very specific requests which could not always be met to his satisfaction, or at all. He expresses his frustration about this in terms of being dependent and powerless in his prison circumstances.

Above all, in these letters, Simon's vitality and complexity are revealed in his own words.

Black and gay

Simon Tseko Nkoli was born in 1957 in Soweto, and brought up by his grandparents on a farm in the Free State. When he was nine he rejoined his mother in the Vaal area. He got involved in the 1976 students' uprising, and was detained by the police again and again between 1976 and 1981, often for months at a time.

Simon's mother found it difficult to accept his homosexuality at first, and forced him into what he called a "year-long tour of the sangomas of Sebokeng" to try to find the causes of his so-called bewitchment. A church minister simply quoted the Bible's anti-gay sections at him. But Simon got support from a psychologist.

When Simon's comrades in the student movement started getting suspicious of his sexual orientation, he came out to them. Many wanted him to give up his position as the Transvaal regional secretary of the Congress of South African Students, arguing that homosexuality was not African. They did not succeed – Simon managed to get the votes that he needed to stay in his position.

Few of the comrades with whom Simon ended up in jail and on trial knew that he was gay, and Simon did not immediately come out to them. In the letters he refers to this issue, but not openly. Later, he would tell the story of his coming out as follows. The prison warders discovered that one of the trialists was having a sexual relationship with a convicted prisoner. The other trialists were outraged and condemned homosexuality outright. Simon decided he had to come out.

This caused hot debate in the cells. Many felt that the state would use Simon's gayness to undermine the moral standing of the anti-apartheid movement which the Delmas treason trialists represented. There was talk of his being tried separately, but some of his co-trialists, and the lawyers, insisted

on one trial for all. Simon's co-trialists eventually accepted his argument that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was as unacceptable as racism.

For many of Simon's co-trialists, this was the first time they were confronted with the issue of homosexuality – and in the person of one of their comrades in the struggle. Simon fundamentally challenged their assumptions, and their attitudes were shifted by his courageous affirmation of his orientation and identity as a black gay man.

When Mosiuoa Lekota, now the Minister of Defence, spoke at Simon's memorial service in December 1998, he said that Simon's coming out had helped him understand that gay rights were part of human rights, and that our society must recognise the humanity of all its people.

Simon's coming out to his co-trialists is an important moment in the development of gay rights in South Africa: the possibilities for gay liberation in South Africa began to glimmer into a realisable future.

Glow and gay rights

Simon struggled for acceptance by his comrades in prison – as well as within the gay organisation he belonged to outside. At the time of his arrest, he was a member of GASA, the Gay Association of South Africa.

GASA had a largely white membership and tried to remain "apolitical" amid the upheaval of the times. Within GASA there was a group for the black minority membership, called Saturday Group, which Simon had got going through an ad in a Sunday newspaper inviting gay black men to write to him. While Simon was in prison, Saturday Group dwindled and died. Simon also participated in the Gay Christian Community, of which Roy was a member.

When Simon was detained, GASA distanced itself from Simon, taking the view that he had not been arrested on gay-related matters. By 1986, GASA's position on Simon had become very controversial, inside and outside the organisation. Articles and letters were published in gay newspaper *Exit*, some of which Simon was able to read and comment on to Roy.

At the same time, international support for Simon, through anti-apartheid and gay organisations, had grown. The International Gay and Lesbian Association, ILGA, considered suspending GASA's membership because of its lack of support for Simon, but GASA folded before the issue was resolved.

GASA's position hurt and finally exasperated Simon. When he came out of



Simon Nkoli leads the 1991 gay Pride march

jail in 1988 he founded a new organisation, the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand. GLOW was non-racial and openly aligned with the struggle against apartheid by its affiliation with the UDF, and became the public face of the fight for gay rights at a time when negotiations for a new South Africa were underway.

In 1990 GLOW organised the first gay and lesbian Pride march in South Africa, and 800 people marched. By 1999, the parade drew an estimated 20 000 people, and a street corner in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, was dedicated to Simon's memory and named after him.

He was among the first gay activists to meet with Nelson Mandela in 1994, and in the same year the interim Constitution for a new South Africa included a clause protecting people from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. This "equality clause" was kept in the final Constitution of 1996, and has been the basis for the growth of gay and lesbian rights in the years since then.

Aids activist

Simon was diagnosed as HIV-positive while in jail. Years later he came out again – this time as someone living with HIV. He was one of the few people in South Africa who were open about their HIV status at that time.

Antiretroviral treatment was not freely available, and Simon, who could not afford the expensive medication, lived with HIV without any treatment for some time before a foreign donor sponsored his treatment. He became an active HIV/AIDS campaigner, in South Africa and abroad. He was a leader of the Township AIDS Project.

Simon died in hospital at age 41 on 30 November 1998, on the eve of World AIDS Day.

Shaun de Waal and Karen Martin

Editors

October 2007

The editors have drawn on the following sources:

George Bizos, *Odyssey to Freedom* (Johannesburg: Random House, 2007)

Edwin Cameron and Mark Gevisser, editors, *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1994)

Neville Hoad, Karen Martin and Graeme Reid, editors, *Sex and Politics in South Africa* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005)

Matthew Krouse, editor, assisted by Kim Berman, *The Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian and Gay Writing from South Africa* (Johannesburg: COSAW, 1993)

Jackie Mondli, "Simon Tseko Nkoli – Out for Freedom", *Wrapped* magazine, 10 (2006)

Rose Moss, "A Matter of State", *Boston Review*, February 1989

Michele Pickover, "Brief history of the Delmas treason trial", January 1993;

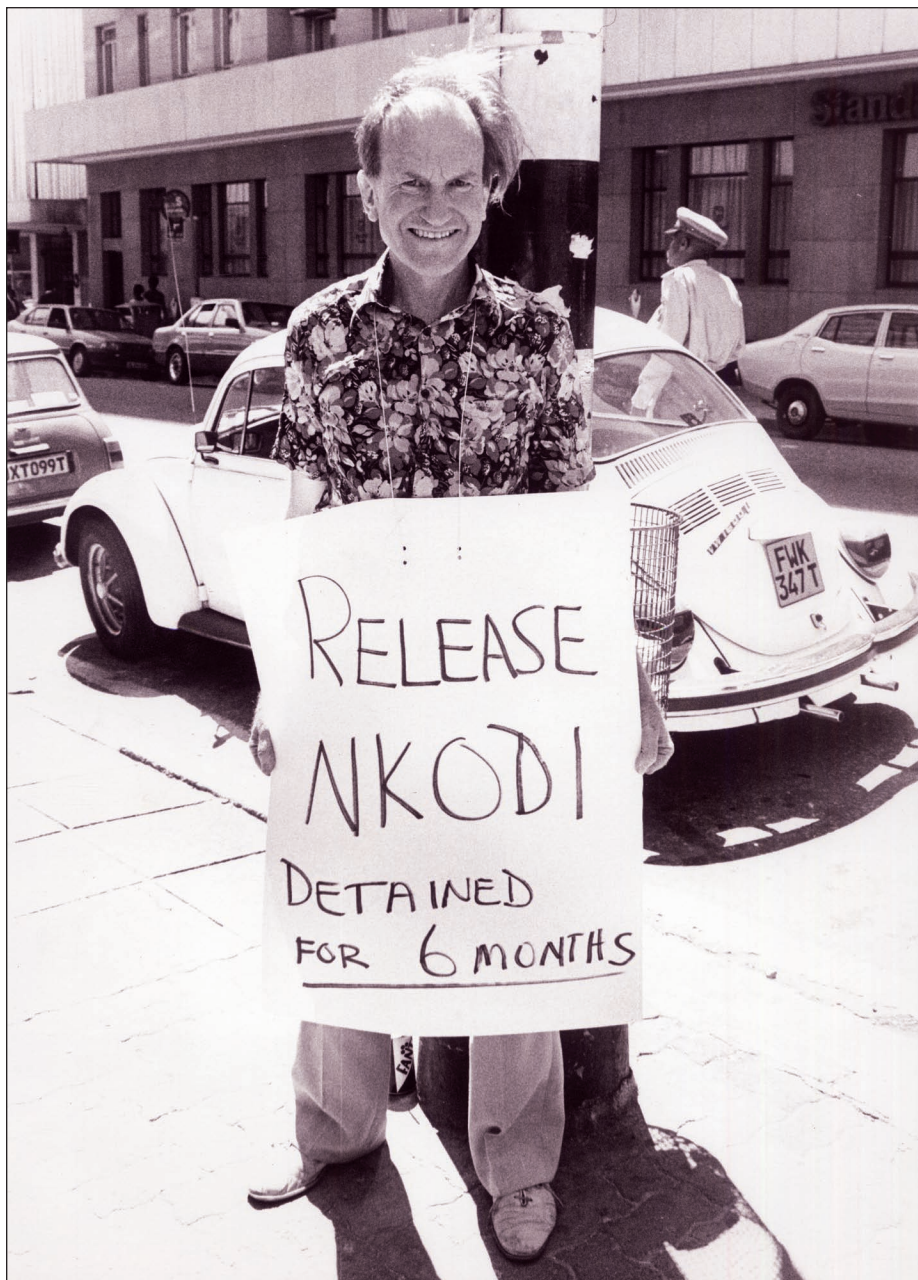
introduction to the South African History Archive's Delmas treason trial collection, which consists of 223 boxes of records of the trial

Simon Nkoli collection, GALA AM2623

Graeme Reid, interview with Simon Nkoli (1997), GALA

Find out more about Simon Nkoli and the Delmas treason trial at www.gala.wits.ac.za and www.saha.org.za.

Thanks to Anthony Manion, GALA archivist.



Roy Shepherd was Simon's lover at the time of his arrest. Simon's name was spelled Nkoli but pronounced "Nkodi". Many people, including Simon himself, used both spellings.

1985

PRETORIA CENTRAL PRISON

Simon was detained in September 1984. The first letter he could write to Roy was on 23 April 1985, seven months later. It was smuggled out of prison, perhaps by one of the trialists' lawyers, as were many others. Letters which went through the formal channels were first checked by the prison censor.

On 11 June 1985, the "Vaal 22" were formally charged. They were accused of treason, attempting to overthrow the state, and furthering the aims of the banned African National congress. The trial began in October 1985. Repeated bail applications failed.

On 21 July 1985, State President PW Botha declared a state of emergency. This gave police even wider powers to suppress protests and detain suspects.

23.04-85

Dear Roy

I am trying to get at least contact with you. But I can't really. I wish I can tell you how well I am, to know about your health. Good gracious Roy, I am not sure of my spelling. My language is so bad. But anyhow, I'll be glad to hear of you. I'll be very happy to know that you haven't gave up praying for us (detainees).

Roy, because of thinking of you everytime, I'll try to face life – though sometime I think otherwise. I completed seven months today, thank God.

Here I am, with Johnny trying to bring me back to the normal world. I appreciate him so much that I'm becoming fond of him – pity he's not gay, isn't it?

"Don't think that committing suicide will help you Simon" Johnny reminded me. "You're too young. The world is yours."

“I promise” I said.

I do really promise Roy. I shall live. I can face life. Maybe for you – and for myself too. God will decide what will happen to me. I am praying that I should be charged or released soon. It won’t be too long anymore I hope.

Let me talk (write) about John Mokoena. He never gets food parcels. Please buy him something, cigarettes. I am sharing my food parcel with him. Report him to DPSC [Detainee Parents Support Committee]. Please. He’s been detained from October.

It will be stupid that the SPs [security police] should find out that I smuggled this letter to you, so be cautious about it. Don’t tell everybody. I’m so nervous now when I am writing.

We are now deprived of exercise – we stay in our cells 24 hrs. Well, I am happy to be with other people. Yesterday I was moved to a cell next to Johnny. I’m so happy to have met him. He’s straight – but accepts me as a friend. Today we have been talking about movies ...

Roy I can’t write the long letter – especially when I don’t know whether you will receive it or not. How can I know that you received it? Will you send me – eh let me think – pair trouser and a jersey, it’s getting cold. Poor Johnny hasn’t got warm clothes.

Sorry Roy – I have to pen off here. Give everybody my regards. I am missing all of my friends.

Good bye
loving yours
Simon

NB if you send me those clothes, I’ll know that you’re fine.

06-05-85

Dear Roy

... I’m very happy that DPSC knows about John. He received food parcels. I am educating my fellow detainees about DPSC. Four of them received green Track Suits. They are thanking DPSC for that reason.

As I said earlier about our hopes of being released or charged this week or next – so dear, have hope too ...

Good bye
Yours forever
Simon Detainee Nkodi

1985-05.18

Beloved Roy

Thank you very much for your letter that I hurriedly read last week. I am so happy to hear that you are still thinking of me. I am also thinking of you Roy. Well, I am sorry to hear that you cried when you read my first letter. Don’t cry over me Roy. I am taking this situation as part of life in the struggle for a better society in the future. Remember that there is no easy walk to FREEDOM ...

Roy dear, please don’t keep this letters with you, destroy them or hide them very far. Don’t even spread the news that you received the smuggled letters. Because I’ll be in Shit. Sorry for the rude language, maybe it’s because I am learning French.

I saw your mother in law (my mother) last week Sunday. She told me that you had been very kind to her. We talked so much about you, that she realised that you’re the part of my (our) family ...

Bad news, some of us are told that their time in detention is extended for three months. I am sure me too. If it is so, don’t worry, the fact remain that at least one day I (we)’ll be charged or released.

Good bye Roy
The Prisoner of Zenda
Simon

23.05.85

Hi Roy

I may say that you’re lucky to receive this simple letter which I think will cheer up your loneliness. Keep up dear and be yourself. Don’t let my detention let you down ...

Today we have been so naughty here at the prison. Ephraim wanted to throw a cigarette to Alfred, but it fell right at the wall from Alfred’s door, so we all went crazy. We started throwing spoons, mugs, plates, soap, washing rags, sugar, books, pillows, blankets, toilet papers, combs, plastic bags, shoes, socks, sheets, trousers and everything we could hold with our hands outside our cells, trying to catch the cigarette for poor Alfred. It was such a fun, we laughed and laughed until some of us nearly collapsed. My abs were sore, Johnny was about to burst out in tears. But you know what happened next? The whole force of prison warders came out in a full force, thinking that we are rioting or something. They asked us what the hell are we doing. Good Lord, they ended up writing that in our files. Bad behaviour they said.

And they ended up punishing us, no music, no news today, Anyhow we don't mind since we didn't come here with radios. They can stick it in their ... ?

My dear me, you know I sometime think what is Gasa [Gay Association of South Africa] saying about me. Do you think they are going to expel me from the association? And what is Saturday Group doing? Probably died ...

Oh! Roy, I nearly forgotten to say thank you for the biscuits or food parcels that you sent to me. You know I was so happy to receive them, and I managed to feed some empty stomachs. Oh Roy thank you. You know since I arrive here this is the second time I receive food parcels. Every Thursday when other people receive food parcels I would be the only one black sheep ...

Roy, there are times I remember you so often, the times when I used to do the house work and cooking for the two of us, sometimes inviting friends for supper. I remember the first time I met you at GCC [Gay Christian Community]. When I moved in to stay with you. It was so gentle, as sweet as summer shine, as warm as the dew on the rosy of yours. I remember those days I used find myself in your arms. Those eyes who used to look at me. They only wanted to see me – only me. Roy I was yours, I was your possession. I loved you and you owned me. I was a beautiful thing in front of your eyes. I often wondered after missing you so much – things will be the same again, will it? Roy, your name appears everyday and everynight in my mind. And when Johnny asked me where and when did I meet my Roy – I just blush on and say “What a question?”

Roy they are coming to switch the light off now, after all. I am about to come to an end of a long letter. It might be a boring letter. Till the time of Trial.

Good bye

Your loving Simon

25 July 1985

Dear Roy

I am trying this silly method to get this letter to you before they could censor it ... I am much more worried about you than I am about myself ... Roy darling it's not wise to be on your own for such a long time – especially when you feel down. I know how do you feel and I put myself in your situation. I do understand it. You are in a

situation that many people are, especially in this trial of mine. But other people's conditions are much better than ours (you and me) – their wives can manage to come and see them when they have the chance ...

Yours Simon

XXX

85-07-29

Dear Roy

... As you can see I am changing my handwriting now and then – it's because I am writing the same letter at different times.

Just now I was standing near my window shouting the news to 21 people 'cos I am the only one having the radio ... Today my radio is silent 'cos she hasn't got batteries ...

I am so sad that Saturday Group has vanished to nowhere. But as soon as I come back from Prison – nevermind for how long – I will start a new progressive gay organisation ...

This is going to be a Marathon trial. Please Roy for my sake, don't ever get yourself into politics. I will die at once if I hear that you detained. Please my Roy, it won't be wise for both of us to be in prison, while now I know that when I am released I am going to fall in your arms ...

Oh Roy I was not aware that this is the last page I have. So goodbye Honey – Yours Sim

1985-08-26

Dearest Roy,

I am not in good term with anyone here except Gcina, Johnny and Simon Vilakazi, whom I see and talk to them sometimes ... For other reasons I am not accepted as a person in this trial. And I am going to ask the state and the lawyers that I should be tried separately – of course and alone. I am going under a heavy pressure and a crisis that I never went through before. Sometimes I think like taking my own life. I really don't know what should I do Roy ...

Yours forever

Simon

I am going under a heavy pressure and a crisis that I never went through before

28-08-85

Dearest Roy

... I have spent the day at Johnny's cell today, we were both chatting about the trial and the prison. Johnny doesn't seem to be threaten by the fact that we may become Prisoners. I am praying hard that we must not go there.

The hymnbook that you sent to me is very difficult, not bad as you said. It is written in an old fashioned language – and no one seem to understand the language in it. But I am trying to catch the lyrics – and one song is coming alright. I am the only one who is having a perfect voice for soprano. Other people can't sing well. They sounds like certain wild animals when trying to sing ...

Oh Roy look how horrible is my handwriting – Jo! I have been making a noise about yours.

Gcina begged me not to single myself out of this trial. But it is very difficult Roy – because nobody seem to understand my life ...

Please Roy, don't start worrying yourself about not being able to see me. Surely you will be able to see me sometime. After all I will come out of prison one day – Keep the ball going and make hay while the sun shines. Of course keep on praying for me. It's lucky that God is still looking after me. God loves me that's why He is taking such good care of me. He love you too Roy, and you will make Him happy if you're getting yourself occupied in Church and with other people.

Roy, dear, I am now falling asleep. I think I better go to bed. Dear me, I am not going to be able to read "Season of Passion". I will wake up early in the morning to read at least one chapter. But surely not at 3.30am. Give my love to everybody in GCC. Hoping to hear from you soon.

From Simon with love

85-09-03

Dearest Roy

... Thank you so much for all the things you send to me, especially the underpants. Dear me! They look so old-fashioned. Hang on! Wait until I put them on. Perhaps they are much better than Gcina's. I shall wear them tomorrow when we go for showering, just to show off, to be model and so on ...

My radio is broken, I don't know what is wrong with it. But on

Sunday morning as I was listening, it stopped playing ... I like the music and it is going to be difficult for me to go on without the music ...

With best Love

Simon

17.09.85

Dearest Roy

... I was in my new white shorts today – Oops! everybody was focusing on me. Can you believe it that more than 42 eyes were on my legs? Pity Zak Jakoob, one of our advocates is blind – maybe he would have commented. Gcina said I look divine. I had a white T-shirt as well, with white socks. Well I seem to like white things. Even my lover is white and living in a white house.

Love Simon

85-09.29

Hellow Roy

How are you? Gcina has written to you so he asked me to address his letter to you – I hope you will enjoy reading it. Gcina is a good letter writer, one can't compare himself with him. I'm too inferior and shy ever since I came to understand that my English is too bad. You made me aware of that.

Of course everybody went to church today except myself. Johnny went and said the service was good. Before he went to church I was playing Monopoly with him. We continued playing when he came back. I was so bankrupt by the time we finished – Johnny won the game although I tried to steal some money everytime he went to the toilet. Nevermind we're playing again over the weekend. This time I will try to be honest with Johnny – and I will not steal the money from the bank ...

I received four Danielle Steel books. All love stories; no politics for me. No thank you, I have been rehabilitated. Funny, when I was outside I never read loves stories so much. I didn't usually read such a trash – or read Mills and Boons. But the situation that I find myself in, somehow I feel sort of in the mood for something light and relaxing, a fairy story ... I am still reading "The Women's Room", I may finish reading it before the end of this week. Vumi is busy reading "The

Guardian of the Word”, Gcina is busy with “I’m OK You’re OK” ...

O dear! O dear! I am going to listen to the top 20 on a radio. I will be dancing so I won’t be able to concentrate on this letter writing. So excuse me please. You’re coming on Thursday isn’t it? So boy I will talk to you then neh – Please bring some Achar with you ...

Loving yours

Simon

(1985-10-03)

Hi there!

... Roy you should not be worried if I didn’t use your name on “My Tears”, it is just a silly book ... not a true story ... The book where I will use your name will be entitled “Love Hangover” or “The Ecstasy”. You’re welcome to help me to choose the name you like between “Love Hangover” and “The Ecstasy” ... or do you want to suggest another heading?

Maybe I must try to explain to you that the book will be based on a true love story between two people, that is (you and me) ... I would be Elvis and your name would remain the same ...

Elvis (myself) had everything he’d ever wanted. A handsome boyfriend ... rich, and adored him, they had everything in common – but Elvis was alone most of the time. They broke the affair and Elvis vowed that he will never love again. He will never fall in love – sex was not his desire but to get work and continue with life.

Until Roy found him. And together they found love and laughter, passion took them by surprise. Stumbling rocks were in front of them – love, hate, threats, possessiveness ... and prison ... They knew that they couldn’t live without each other. And (Roy and Simon) had never foreseen the devastating changes that would happen to them ... Or would the priceless promise of love for a life time live only in the bittersweet heart break of “Love Hangover” or “The Ecstasy”?

I just pray that I should get my English write – no I mean right. Not this write – but this right. You see it’s like sea but not not or knot – ship and sheep. CAN I see or Can of beans. O! dear oh deer – and all the odds and ends my english is bad ...

I love you

Yours faithfully

Simon Nkodi

6.15 am (1985-10.06)

Bonjour Monsieur Shepherd, comment allez-vous? I just wake up now and Bob Dylan is playing a good music on the radio. I like his “Slow train coming”, I’m sure I am going to buy it when I come home – I’m quite lazy this morning, I haven’t done my bed yet – but I am eating an orange ... I wonder why I am getting so fat. I should have brushed my teeth at least eh. Gargling with hot water will do for time being. Mind my English, I’m not even sure of the word “gargle”, just used it, I’m sure you will correct it. Do you know that in French the word “correct” remain the same but pronounced “corrang” or something like that. You can also say “juste” for correct.

Last night I only read one chapter in “The Women’s Room”, that was from page 183-188, too little, then I fall asleep. The book has about 637 pages – so exciting, but I am a slow reader. Do you think I’ll finish reading it? Today I’ll try to read enough pages and reach to the middle of the book – how about that ...

3.45pm

Too bad, we didn’t have a chance to play Monopoly – after church we had some discussions – heavy political discussion – I hate this kind of discussions sometimes. We were having a great time today playing soccer – I was in the same team as Johnny and Gcina. Johnny was a bad goal keeper and we lost the game. The score was 6 for other people and we only scored 4. I was a bad player as well. I couldn’t kick the ball well, instead I kicked other people. The people kept on boxing at me. I don’t think I will ever play soccer with them again ...

Good bye – Love

Simon

The Same Place

16.10.1985

Dearest Roy

Oh! Roy you’re a special gift from God. You did something that I was not expecting, Dear me, the jackets, shirts and ties. Just for me. Thank you very much, I’m so excited and wish to be with you ...

This time Roy you must be sympathetic to me with my spelling mistakes and my broken English. I am in such a hurry because we’re leaving for court in Delmas ...

Yesterday, during the day I was panicking – not knowing what to

**We were
having a
great time
today
playing
soccer**

do. “Oh! Johnny, what has happened to Roy? I hope he is fine – but at least Caroline could have some message from him?” ... Simon Vilakazi felt sorry for me. “I’m sure I can lend you my jacket – don’t worry Simon,” he comforted.

I went in my cell, thinking of you. I knew that you are thinking of me – but I was sulking, refusing food. Johnny offered to lend me his jacket and will go to court in a lumber jacket. I was telling both Johnny and Simon how worried am I about you ...

Johnny offered me some coffee – while drinking, Popo Molefe entered my cell with a bunch of clothes – “Simon these are from Roy” – I nearly had a heart attack.

“YOU MUST BE JOKING! ARE YOU KIDDING! DID YOU SEE HIM? WHY DIDN’T HE CALL ME?” I screamed like those screaming Queens in the Dungeon [a gay club]. The pants were too long, but Johnny will mend them to me. Thank you once more Roy and God bless you.

Gcina hasn’t seen my new clothes yet. Where did you buy them? I like the punk jacket – How did you know that I’m punk? I’m so excited that you didn’t buy a suit ... I hate wearing suits ...

I have to get ready for the hearing. I have to go to the bath – and try to comb my uncontrollable and disorganised hair – and try to beautify my ugly and unbearable face. Thanks for Dente Deodorant, it will prevent some smellings from my body – Cheer – up.

Yours in Love

Psymon

1985 OCTOBER 21

Dear Roy

... Did you get my clothes? I hope you didn’t mix them with those I wanted back. I was hoping to get bail and that would solve my clothes problem. But we didn’t get bail because the state said that the security is tense. If the situation improves outside, the Attorney General will give us bail – so we’ll keep on trying until the end of the trial. It looks as if the trial will go on for 12 months. That is not too long Roy ...

Hoping to hear from you soon

Loving yours

Simon

1985-10-24

Dearest Roy

Comment allez-vous? My mother gave a Huge and enormous Surprise by visiting me unexpected. She was so bright and young, wise and beautiful. We really had a good chat....

The bail application should not depress you guys there. We were also unhappy about the outcome – but we’re now fine ... after all we think our trial will go on until the end of 1986 or early 1987. God alone knows, but He will protect us ...

I’m so lazy now days. I’m not studying or learning my French. I skip my yoga. I’m only reading books – and sleeping – eating – and washing myself. I’m sure that is why I’m getting so fat. Ha! Ha! ...

I’m getting annoyed everytime, because people keep on saying I am BEAUTIFUL. Handsome – gentle – sweet hearted. They complain about me, for having no fights. They say I never get angry. I’m so polite. Why should I fight – or scream? In fact they are all a bunch of liars – twice I kicked Jacob. Can’t they see that I am aggressive – that’s why I kicked Jake! ...

Don’t forget your ID Book when you come on Thursday.

Hoping to hear from you soon

Love

Simon

XXX

1985-10.27

Dear Roy

... Jacob and I were so lucky today – we were playing the casino game against Mr Mphuthi and Popo Molefe – we played 12 games, and we won ten of them – and they lost 10 of them. The score was 10:2. Poor Johnny was all by himself today. Not sulking but he was not happy either. I made a cup of coffee for him just before I was locked in my cell ...

Jacob said you (Roy) are a lucky person to have a beautiful friend like (Simon) me. The people annoys me when they say that I’m beautiful. I disagree with them. All of us are beautiful Roy, aren’t we? If I am beautiful? It is for you alone. Say that you love me, for without you I can’t live ...

loving yours

Simon Nkodi



On 8 September 1985, Simon asked Roy to send him some pictures they had taken the year before: "I just want to see the farm, the horse – the children and the oldies. Do I have the one where I was on the horse? Also there was an album where I was at Zoo Lake ..." (above). On 29 September, he wrote: "I enjoyed looking at the photos ... They make me feel all right ..."

MODDERBEE PRISON

Towards the end of 1986 the trialists were moved to Modderbee Prison in Benoni on the East Rand, because it was (somewhat) closer to Delmas.

1985-11-10

My dearest Roy

I received your letter dated 22/10/85, three days after we arrived in Modderbee. Thank you very much for the watch – now I'm going to look like a bourgeois. Did you buy it or somebody gave it to you? Anyway I'm sure it will mark my 27th Birthday. But you sent it so early. Never mind I like it so much.

Love Simon

5 December 1985

My beloved Roy

... Gasa has done nothing for me since I was arrested ... That has frustrated me a little and I know you are not going to be happy to hear such a story from me – but however ... some individual members of Gasa are seeing me – ... I will remain a member of Gasa always ...

Loving yours

Simon

1985-12.15

My dearest Roy

... Roy the prison authorities say that we are only allowed to write about 500-600 words in a letter because long letters cost the censor a long time to read. He was talking to our committee ... He quoted your letters to me as an example – and when the committee reported that to us, I was embarrassed, but to hear your name made me to blush a little. So honey try to write short letters, because in future they will not give me your letters ... Roy please don't be offended – but do understand ... I love you, and your letters keep me going. Everytime I receive a letter from you I've got the reason to live for you ...

Good bye my Roy

Love you, Simon

xxx

1985-12.17

My dearest Roy

... Since we moved to a communal cell, we're so busy that we are always tired at the end of the evening. We are reading so many documents concerning our trial. Having boring and long discussions, meetings and few games. But I promise to write at least once a week. I know you need my letters so much as I need yours. I am missing you so much Roy – Don't get angry with Caroline, she is very supportive and concerned about (you & me). She is always telling me that I must be strong because "Roy loves you" and you're waiting for me ...

Good by love

Your forever Simon

1985.12.31

10.45 am

Dearest Roy

Popo doesn't like me writing letters, he said I spent more time on writing letters than preparing for the trial. So I had slipped out of the cell to the spare room where no one can see me while writing. Jerry is sitting in the same room reading Drum Magazine and Lazarus is playing soccer or kicking the ball all over the room. But I think I will concentrate neh ...

People seem to be wanting to use this room for reading or something. So I will leave for a moment. I will come back to you later.

11.40am. I was not too long neh ... I want to cut my hair but Jake doesn't want me to – Johnny said my hair is ugly – Gcina and Jake said I'll be ugly if I do cut my hair, they say Johnny is jealous about my hair because he is growing bald ...

Wishing you happy new year –

Yours in Love

Simon

**I know
you need
my letters
so much
as I need
yours**

1986

In June 1986, State President PW Botha renewed the state of emergency. It would remain in place until 1990.

A year after the trial began, in November 1986, three of the trialists were released because the state has not been able to formulate charges against them. Six others were given bail.

1 January 1986

Hi Roy

It's midnight, in the morning of the 1st January 1986 – time is about 2.45 am. I am going to sleep now after singing and shouting happy new year to everyone. Of course at the moment I am thinking of you in particular. Roy you are being missed by me. Today is almost 465 days without you. I wonder how many more days to go before I hold you in my arms – But with God's help it will be soon – This new year brings lots of hope to myself ... 1986 will be the year that I will try to go ahead with my French – What are you going to do this year – Ha! Ha! Enjoy every passing boy and wait for me?

xxx

Love Simon

1986-01-05

Sunday evening

Time 10.08

My beloved Roy

How are you this evening? I am so tired after all these days of working on documents... I think I'd rather sleep now.

We went to the church service this morning and I was so late that I didn't prepare the hymns, the people are singing so badly now days and I am sick of correcting them. They don't seem to want to sing well at all.

Did you read "The Boys on the Rock"? Gee pas you must read it.

I am busy reading Marilyn French's "Bleeding Heart". It is quite exciting to read it – but she is not as good as Danielle Steel. Last week I was crying as I finished reading "To Love Again" by Danielle Steel ...

By reading Danielle Steel I learn so much about how some people suffer because of love – but one also learns to be brave, and courage is dwelling in me. I've learnt that I should wait – pray – wait – pray – wait – pray – suffer – communicate with other people – remember – think – recall the past – think of the future – And I am still living ...

Loving yours,

Simon

xxx

8.45pm

1986.01.24

My dearest Roy

... The trial is going well my beloved. It is rather boring to sit there on the hard chairs for 5 hours a day. And sit in a van for 1 hour. When we get back to the cells we're so tired, we can't read, write or play any game. It is too tough my dear. At the moment I am falling asleep. So I think I would not be able to end this letter. I will continue with it tomorrow afternoon ...

Today was our sixth day in court – but we are still busy with the third witness ...

Gosh Roy, it is about 10 pm now and I have to wake up early tomorrow morning since we are going to court. Worst of all it is our turn to clean up the cell in the morning – and we have to give all the 22 of us breakfast. Oh! what a crazy week. Anyway I hope we shall see each other at the hearing neh ... Hoping to hear from you soon.

Your loving one

Simon

xxx

NB: May you please get me those black pants of mine fixed. I rather doubt whether they will fit me, but I am trying to loose some weight.

February 27 1986

My beloved Roy

Your mother in law is something great sometimes, she bought me some delicious meal. She sent it through Andrew [Simon's brother]. It was dumpling for 22 people and chicken for at least the majority of

1986

It is rather boring to sit there on the hard chairs for 5 hours a day

us. Johnny's mother did the same – dumpling and chicken. Today was a day of eating in this cell, if we had music and booze we could have organised a big party ...

The trial is going quite well, ha! ha! Are you following everything on the newspapers? I know you are getting few or shortened news from the newspapers. But it is going well so far, believe me Roy. So far there is nothing in this trial indicating that one should go to prison. But if we do go to prison, you must not be disappointed – I shall come back to you. Man I shall live for you Roy – Promise me that you will wait for me until I come back. Will you?

Roy I will write again over the weekend ...

Simon

7 April 1986

My dearest Roy

... When I come out of prison, I will continue my membership of Gasa – and I will do whatever I can to improve the standard of communication between gays of all races ...

I am worried about letters which I wrote ... That is why I posted this one through other means. Roy I won't do this often because I will be in a big problem should I be caught ...

I will try again to write to you.

Simon.

9.04.86

... I have another idea about launching a new gay association when I get out of prison – maybe a progressive association. What will we call it? What about Cosag (Congress of South African Gays) or Nadega (National Democratic Gays Association). Don't you think it's a charming idea? Wait until I come out. Of course this will be a non-racial gay association. People should start thinking about that ...

Oh! Roy! I AM GETTING LATE. I was not aware, everybody is going to the van and yet I am not dressed.

Good bye

Love

Yours always

Simon

21 April 1986

My dearest

... Everymorning when I go to court I have to hide Jammy under my bed in a box. Of course I pray that when writing to me, you have not mentioned him. Because if you do, honey I will be in for a high jump. So guys don't ever ask me silly questions in your letters about him. You know questions like "Did you get the radio?" ...

Today I was praying in court while George Bizos was cross-examining Brig GJ Viljoen. God that man is a forgetful person. He was there when I was arrested, and he was the guy who slapped me across the face, but he couldn't recognise me in court ... He is giving evidence on the happenings of the 3rd Sept, 15th and the 23rd. I am sure he'll be finished tomorrow. We have completed 3 months in Court and yet only 24 people have given evidence for the State – and only one of them have mentioned my name. I am no longer taking notes in court. It is quite boring ...

Keep well

With love

Simon

22 May 1986

Dear Roy

Tomorrow I'll be 20 months in Prison and yet I am full of life. I hope you are feeling the same ... I wonder how long more will we be separated – let's hope it won't be longer than at least five years. It seems as if you do have more hope than I have ...

We are dealing with witness no 61. We don't know how many more witness are to come. Next month on the 11th June we shall be completing a year since we were charged ...

Roy I am going to be busy working on my case for the next two and half hours. There after I'll be tired. So I'll write to you again some time during the weekend ...

Loving yours

Simon

xxx

The same address
31 May 1986

My dearest Roy

... Brown suit! Mm, that is what I asked you to buy for me. Brown suit will be nice with a yellow or pink shirt and brownish tie. Do you think you'll manage to get me those things Roy? I pray you do. You know I feel so guilty when I ask you to buy me things and yet I am doing nothing for you Roy ...

Roy I am happy that you are not going in the townships. It is not safe at all – so please as long as I am Prison, honey keep yourself away from the townships, even if one of your black friends invited you Roy. For my sake honey stay away ...

Roy dear, time has gone so fast today – it is almost 8.20pm and I am falling asleep. I want to read a little before I sleep ...

I love you. Simon.

Sunday
8.06.86

My dearest Roy

... Johnny's girlfriend came on Friday as well, so I was the only one sitting there on the benches looking at other people talking to their friends, parents and lovers, wishing that I could have courage to interfere as they always do when my lover is around. I suppose they all don't recognise him because a gay relationship is not supposed to be real.

Promise to write again soon ...

With much of love

Simon

17 June 1986

Dearest Roy

I am aware that I took my own time before writing to you. Roy I was very tense because of the present situation in the country. I didn't know what might have happen to you since you failed to come on Thursday ... I was praying that you were not arrested under the state of emergency ...

Oh Roy dear, Let me sleep now. Please keep well ...

Yours faithfully,

Simon

15 July 1986

My beloved Roy

I am very sorry to be so long before I could write to you. In fact I had been very busy now days consulting with lawyers ...

They're playing a good music on the radio. Do you ever listen to a radio Roy? There's a new lady that I happen to love her music. She is Jennifer Rush. Please honey in future if you feel like buying me a tape get me her "International Version" instead of Elvis Presley ... Do you remember what kind of music I do like? Well let me remind you. I like reggae, fusion, disco, African music and country ...

Well I have lots of work to do now darling. I'll write again over the weekend.

Love you

Simon

23 July 1987

Dearest Roy

Today I am completing 22 months in prison and yet we don't know what is the future holding for us. Next week Wednesday we are starting again with this boring trial. Although we thought that the state is finish with the Vaal evidence, we heard that they are going to call more witness from Vaal and to give evidence about the murder. I wonder which murder they are interested in ...

Roy I am feeling tired at the moment and I just want to get to bed. I'll write to you again tomorrow or Friday. I'm too busy now days working on the trial.

Keep well love

Simon

02 August 1986

My dearest Roy

... What are the gay related matters Gasa wanted me to be arrested for? Sodomy? Loitering? Public indecent, or what? I am absolutely mad to read about me being arrested on "irrelevant" issues to gay related matters...

Roy let me get in bed now, I am feeling tired and I have a headache. I'll continue writing tomorrow and I'll post this letter on Monday neh.

22
months
in prison
and yet
we don't
know
what is
the future
holding
for us

Anyone wishing to write to Simon Nkoli, or to send contributions, supplies or food rations to the Vaal 22, may do so via these two addresses:

1) Roy Shepherd
115A Dorian Street
Belgravia
Johannesburg
South Africa

2) Pricilla Jana
P.O. Box 61875
Marshalltown 2107
Johannesburg
South Africa



Overseas, as in South Africa, Simon Nkoli brought the gay rights movement and the anti-apartheid movement together. Above, a note in the *ILGA Bulletin*, February 1987. Right, British campaigner for gay rights Peter Tatchell at a London protest



1986 – AUGUST 03

I did not finish writing yesterday, so let me see what can I tell you today. I am not really well. I have a sore in my mouth. I had seen a doctor on Saturday but my medicine has not arrived yet. My ear is also infected. Well everything will be alright. My handwriting is terrible, I wonder whether you will be able to read it ...

My mother is going to buy me a Carducci suit. Oh! I am so pleased Roy. My mother really loves me and I do love her so much. I have been crying, moaning and dying to have a Carducci suit for ages ...

The state is calling 7 witnesses from the Vaal to come and testify about the murder of a councillor who was killed on the 3rd of September. They claim that Gcina was among the people who killed that man. They may try to implicate me as well since everywhere Gcina is placed I am also placed and vice-versa. They are also going to call 6 witnesses from Alexandra, plus a few from Durban. Then in September the state will close their case. That will mean I have to work hard and try to concentrate on the trial, because in November we will be going to the witness box ...

I am going to sleep now Roy. Keep well ...

With much love

Simon

11 August 1986

My beloved Roy

The trial is quite boring today. There is an expert on tapes giving a long evidence on how tapes were recorded, how he tested them to find out that they are originals. He is doing this in Afrikaans. Though there is a court interpreter, I am absolutely bored. That is why I decided to take out my pen and write to you while this is happening.

I am sure you are well health-wise. I am also feeling well apart from being bored. I thought I'd be tired because this morning I woke up at about 4.00am to clean the whole cell and by 5am I was about to finish cleaning. Well I am going to wake up at 4am for the rest of this week since it is our turn to clean up the cell ...

In October we are going to adjourn again – from 9th-20th October. Well that is 10 days “holidays”. It seems as if we will really continue until next year some time, maybe in March or April. But I think I'll be free at the end of this trial – most of us, maybe all of us. We must keep on hoping Roy ...

My sore in my mouth is healed at last and now I can enjoy meals like other people. I don't know whether did I tell you of my illness on last time's letter. I was feeling so horrible – for those days I could not put anything in my mouth, I could not speak or utter a single word ...

With my everlasting love,

Simon

23 August 1986

My beloved Roy

Today I am left with only one month then I will be 2 yrs in this world of loneliness. But all the same I am still coping well, that's great. I received Exit that you gave to Caroline. I was so bitter about it ... Oh! Roy – anyhow, don't worry about all these wishywashy things.

André van Zyl [Simon's lover before he met Roy]... used to call me Tiger because he knew that I was not easily intimidated ... I am the rock, and if Gasa do try and struck me, honey they won't succeed ...

Caroline told me that Daddy Makhetha [Simon's father] bought me a suit, but you said it is not a nice one ... After all, he doesn't know my taste as far as clothes are concerned. He should have asked me what I want. Now there he went buying that suit which you said is ugly. Well let it come. I may sell it and buy myself a better one. Actually I need some summer pyjamas, the short ones, morning slippers and a long gown – a gown of many flowers, a colourful one. So I will sell that suit – or maybe he will be angry neh. But the poor old man – he bought that ugly suit because he loves me. I must take it. But how am I going to wear something that does not suit me? Alright, I'll maybe just keep it as a treasure.

It is almost 9.48 now Roy, let me go to sleep. I'll continue with this letter tomorrow morning.

24 Sunday 1986 August

My beloved Roy

... Caroline brought me that suit that Dad bought for me. Oh! no! Roy it is BEAUTIFUL. I like it very much. But it is too big for me, especially the trouser. I am going to take it for alteration on Monday. It will depend on whether Caroline is coming ... Roy I am grateful to you, please keep calm and well ...

I love you Roy

Simon

4 September 1986

My beloved Roy

... I don't want it when people start talking about me. That's why I become too scared when Gasa started debating about me as if I USED TO LIVE. I am still living ... I am sorry to tell you that I have decided to resign from Gasa as soon as I come out –

... I am tired now ... I'll try to write again over the weekend. Keep well Roy ... Hoping to hear from you soon.

With all my love

Simon

xxx

9 November 1986

My dearest Roy

... What do you think about how our defence argued our case – especially the application for our discharge? In fact it was during this application that I realised that the state has no case against all of us ... Some of us who may not be released, we will have another year in Prison – what a pity. I was always thinking that the defence case will be much shorter than the state, but now I learn that the defence has got more witnesses than the state ...

Roy dear I want to save some money – well enough money to buy myself a sky blue Carducci suit. You must just go around the shops and find out for me how much it is ...

Roy dear I won't be able to go on with this letter, because I am now falling asleep ... I am thinking of you Roy – I promise that I will look after you, care for you as I said before. I have not changed my mind ... So honey keep well – till you hear from me one day. I am missing you very much Roy.

Loving yours

Simon

xxx

7.11.86

My beloved Roy

Life is still going on as usually except that I am missing you very much. Christmas, new year and birthdays are approaching me once more. I hope this will be the last Christmas that I am going to spend

behind bars ... I am sorry that I have no time to write to you – I find myself so busy now days, though I have completed my statement. But I think I need to go though it once again – you know, to clarify some of the things in it. I have to re-read the documents that the state is going to ask me about should I go to the witness box. But all the same I will try to write to you over the weekend. Keep well Roy.

I love you

Simon

xxx

14.11.86

6.30pm

My dearest Roy

... We are going to have our meeting in 9 minutes. I really hate this meetings because now I have to go there instead of writing to you. All the same I will write to you after this meeting. Let me go and have some tea.

9.38pm

After the meeting we went for a supper. Gcina, Johny and I had beef and baked beans, then thereafter Gcina and I joined the guys who were playing Monopoly, at which Gcina and I ended up losing the game. So now I am so tired and I am sitting on my bed and thinking of you. I am thinking of you, and I know that you must be thinking of me too. So we are thinking of each other.

All the same I am also listening to a good music from a tape called "Diamonds and rust" by Joan Baez ... It is one of the good music that I wish you will like ... The music is the only thing that makes me feel happy during lonely times and it makes days to pass by as well ...

I have worked so hard on my statement and I am just relaxing at the moment, going through it sometime to remind me of what I wrote. I am going to give evidence in my mother's language (Sesotho). I think I will express myself in Sotho and of course I will manage to control myself – and avoid to cause any mistakes.

They may switch the lights off from now on Roy – so I better put the pens away in time so that I must not make – Oops there goes the lights

I don't see the lines, So let me Sleep good night Roy –

**I hope this
will be
the last
Christmas
that I am
going to
spend
behind
bars**

22.11.86

2:01 pm

My dearest Roy

I was so excited when Caroline gave me the pair of jeans that you bought for me. "I am going to wear it with my yellow shirt," I told myself. But honey I was so disappointed when I discovered that they were so big, the zip was broken – there is nothing I could do about them. Really size 32 is rather big for me. All the same Roy I gave them to Gcina because they fit him well. I will ask Caroline to get them zipped for Gcina. So please don't buy me another pair of jeans, ... I think I've enough of BIG TROUSERS that needs to be altered everytime. It is really a pity none of you can ever know my size ...

So the bloody state has completed arguing their case, so our defence is going to answer them on Monday and we are hoping that the judgement will come out during the course of next week – before the end of next month. Then we who are not going to be discharged will be remanded until the 20 January 1987. So you must be patient for one year again Roy. I hope that I will be acquitted at the end of the trial. I will try to be a good witness Roy, though I am feeling too scared to stand in the witness box. I don't want the people to look at me when I am giving evidence and the prosecutor shouting at me ...

When I am released ... I am going to wear blue contact lenses to make my eyes be blue. I don't like my brown eyes, everybody tells me I have the eyes of a kitten. I also observed that one day as I was looking through the mirror and all of sudden I remembered why André van Zyl used to call me "Tiger" ...

8:15pm

... Gcina is busy preparing supper now, we are going to have brown bread with sour milk. Mm, I really wonder what are you eating. I remember how you used to buy beef and some green peas. Do you still remember my chicken? Oh I also remember your "winter soup". I am missing all those days Roy and I am hoping that it won't be too long before those days return again.

On Wednesday is my birthday (26.11.86) according to my mother, I wonder what will I get from her Dear Lord. And what about the 26.12.86 (it will be my birthday according to my birth certificate, I don't really know what is happening)? ... Oh! may you please buy as many cards as you can – Well I have 86 people I want to send the cards to ... Please Roy do me that favour as soon as you get this letter

– I want to sent these Christmas cards as soon as possible – there are about 5 weeks left before Christmas. Please honey ...

Roy dear let me polish my shoes 'cos tomorrow we are going to the hearing. Wish us good luck Roy and cross your finger once more for us.

I am missing you and I will always belong to you.

Thinking of you always

Your loving one

Simon

XXX

3 December 1986

My dearest Roy

How are you doing now days? I do hope you are coping well with life, especially when your friends are out ... Roy, I am not going to be long in Prison, not anymore. If you can be a little more stronger, little more braver, then I know that you are with me whole heartedly, then I will be brave in the witness box. The guys who have been acquitted and those out on bail will keep you busy ...

Yesterday was my lucky day. Priscilla and her husband bought shirts for all of us. And I was the only one whose size was correct. Then later Aubrey Mokoena brought pairs of running shoes. Now I am going to play soccer again. In fact I started playing today – and we lost 7-3. There are only 8 people playing soccer – so we have four people in one team. But we have to run so much because the sportfield is very big for 8 people running all over the place ...

I am not sure whether I will be a member of any existing gay organisation. I may remain in Gasa ...

I must go to bed now darling, but I must start reading something. Maybe I must re-read the "Promises" by Danielle Steel. You bought it for me last year. During the day I am doing my statements, and all the odds and ends of the trial. Roy love, keep well and think of our everlasting love. I wish you happy Christmas. You will hear from me after the court resumes ...

With all my love

Simon xxx

1987

Simon had been in prison for more than two years, and the trial had been running for more than a year. At last it would be Simon's turn to give evidence. In June he would be released on bail

6 January 1987

My dearest Roy

I was happy to see Caroline here yesterday because she is the only link between you and I. But she told me you are unhappy about something, I think she said something to do with short time you spent with me when you were here. Well honey, I was also angry, disappointed and depressed. But I was helpless, there was nothing I could do. But darling that was not the end of the world. We are meant for each other, so I believe one day we will be together again. Let us keep on hoping and praying.

About clothes – I wish I could ask you to buy me, but I am not going to trouble you. You don't know my size, or the shops out there have not my size. I do sew those who are torn, mend them. I know that if you knew my size, my taste in clothes, I could be not suffering. Life would be much easier for me. I think it serves me good not to depend on other people ...

Keep well Roy.

With all my love

Simon

xxx

22.01.-87.

My dear Roy

I was delighted to hear from you, though I was so disappointed that I did not receive all the clothes I needed ... Tomorrow I thought I will be wearing the light grey trousers and the yellow jacket that you

bought for me, when we going to court – Jana seem to like that jacket, every time she comes around she is asking me “Where is your yellow jacket?” ...

I am/was really in crisis this week – well I often find myself in this situation and I often hated to be alive. But I have to accept this situation. I hate begging and asking ...

The doctor that I saw on Thursday said I may suffer from ulcer because I am not eating well ... God! I hope it is not going to catch me. Does it kill? ...

Roy darling let me close this letter now, I will try to write again over the weekend. But you must be sure about our love, it will never die neh. So let us keep it burning and strong.

Hoping to hear from you soon – missing you

With my everlasting

24.02.-1987

Dearest Roy

... I am writing this letter sitting in the courtroom ... I have to listen to Ephraim now since he is going to talk about the march of 3rd September. See you later darling. Keep well for now.

6.23 pm

... I hope they didn't tell you about the drama that took place on 18/2/87. Well Roy, I had not eaten from Tuesday the 17/2/87 ... and I was sick with flu, and I was sitting in the dock. I feel heat all over my body, I was sneezing, coughing, felt a pain in my stomach. I thought I was dying or something. Then I left the courtroom. I was taken to the doctor who told me that same old story about danger of an empty stomach, how easy it will be to have an ulcer. So I started eating again, and believe me I am really gaining weight ...

I am going to brush my teeth now and jump into my bed.

Love you now and forever

Simon Nkodi

xxx

**I am/was
really in
crisis this
week**

1987

25 February 1987

My dearest Roy
... It is 8.30 now ... I've so much to do now days. I am preparing myself for going to the witness box. It seems as if there are about four or five people before me. I have so much to do indeed. Roy, I do hope you understand ...

I do love you
Simon xxx

29.02.87 Thursday

Darling
... Bavumile is still in the witness box. Oh! Gosh almost 8 days now and we don't know how long will they keep him in the witness box. Don't ask leave now Roy – wait till I go in the witness box, don't you think that will be the good idea? ...

Roy dear ... remember every moment I am thinking of you ...
I am all yours
With lots of love Simon
XXX

12 April 1987

Dearest Roy
... I don't want to hear what Gasa want to join or not. I am not interested in Gasa at all. In fact I am no longer a member of Gasa – or I shall not be a member of Gasa again. I am going to write a letter to inform them that I am not or I am unable to function as a member of Gasa ...

With all my love
Simon

13 April 1987

... My dear me! I have left your letter in the cell and now I am locked alone in a store-room. How nice to be on my own at last Roy – Piece in my mind. I feel like asking the Prison Authorities to give me a single cell. I mean Peace not Piece. To live alone where nobody will ever think that I can spread Aids – to live alone where Aids will never come as part of our discussion. Like I am sitting now Roy. I am alone. At least I am enjoying this part of the day. Soon I will be going to the prison shop to buy food and other parcels for the rest of the people.

Maybe I will ask warder Schlebusch to lock me in the storeroom again ...

With all my love
Simon

8 June 1987

My one and only Roy
... There is nothing I want more than a sky blue suit ... You will have to choose between the following – Christian Dior and Carducci. If you manage to get me the sky blue suit, please Roy get me a sky blue tie as well. If you don't get the sky blue colour, then the purple colour will do – The colour purple – both the suit and the tie. I also need running shoes size 7 ...

Lunch time is over and I did not have time to read your letter again so that is bad because I can't read it now while the proceedings are going on. If I do I will disturb many people in this court including the Judge and his assessor – ...

6.52pm

Back to my prison cell, in my bed lying there and listing to Cindy Lauper, thank you for buying this tape. She is now singing IKO IKO which I don't know what it is. My handwriting must be terrible because I am lying on my back and the way I am lying I can't even see the lines on this pad ...

What do you mean by "You have four outfits"? ... I'm honest, darling I hate demanding too much from you especially. It seems as if I'm exploiting you, using you ...

... Roy I love you very much, I loved you when I saw you. You are the person that my heart chose, and your heart chose me. You and I are the chosen few, we are lucky people ...

You are me – we are one – You are Simon – and I'm Roy. When I change my name I'll be Simon Nkoli Shepherd or Simon Shepherd Nkoli. My father wants me to be Simon Nkoli Makhetha. Well I'm old enough to decide to be Simon Shepherd Nkoli, I think that will be much easier ...

Till you hear from your loving and only Simon
love
XXX

This is the last letter from Simon to Roy in the archives. He was released on bail shortly afterwards.



Without queer history there is no queer pride

GALA: Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action

GALA collects, stores and indexes papers and objects that tell the story of LGBT history in South Africa. Secret diaries and steamy love letters, personal photograph albums and racy home movies, formal documents from political and other organisations, news clippings, vintage magazines, frocks and wigs, posters, intimate interviews ... you name it, we want it and will keep it for the future.

And GALA is always looking for more.

Have you got a story to tell? Let us interview you. Or perhaps you'd like to let us take care of that box of letters you've saved not quite knowing why?

You can stay anonymous, or you can instruct us to keep things out of the public eye for a few years – whatever feels right for you.

If we don't tell our stories it's as though they never happened.

For more information phone the GALA archivist on 011 717 1963 or visit www.gala.wits.ac.za.

