

Dear Richard, Renee + girls

31 December 1993

"A man may write at any time, if he will set himself doggedly to it" (Samuel Johnson).

And so, finally, I have set myself doggedly to it. Apologies for the lateness but events overtook me as you will see when reading on. It would be unthinkable not to share this annual conversation with you so I hope you will accept our early 1994 greeting. May the year be prosperous and peaceful - in the case of South Africa the latter is a prerequisite for the former!

1993 was a most exciting year in the Austin household - Cheryl says its been that way since she married me (I am happy to assume that is a compliment!). The year began against the background of our fairly new settlement in Johannesburg and the family were having some difficulty getting used to the new surrounds. With the beginning of the new term there was a sudden change as the children found themselves on familiar ground and Cheryl got involved with the school PTA. Almost overnight everyone was happy in Johannesburg and new friendships were quickly made by all three. This obviously made my life a bit more relaxed and we were able to start enjoying the various pleasures of the "City of Gold".

The political changes have been dramatic over the past 4 years and 1993 was no exception - from the low point of the Chris Hani assassination to the high of the Mandela/ De Klerk Nobel prize! One can have a cup "half-full" or "half-empty" attitude to the future - ours is half-full. The potential for growth in this Southern African region is huge and I think the preparations for transition to a new government have been unique for this continent. The election in April next year is obviously key to the future not so much for the result as for the accompanying actions and reactions!

And so to the family.

Cheryl has had an interesting year. As I mentioned she got herself elected to the school PTA and in typical fashion ending up playing a key role in the affairs of the school. This has given her a circle of friends with similar interests and helped her to settle. It has also been very good for Ryan and Lauren as the parents involvement rubs off on the teachers. In February last year I finally lost my patience with her partner in the timeshare rental business (he was simply taking 50% of the profit and making no contribution) and so we terminated the partnership. Cheryl continued on her own and has had reasonable success - although not as good as we would like. She started doing temporary assignments for Kelly Girl and, again in her typical way, is in great demand by them. To the extent that the different branches of KG fight to get her for assignments! This has been useful since it gives Cheryl guaranteed income but with the flexibility of selecting those assignments which suit her.

Ryan has done very well again. He has been studying at a special college for gifted children (taking mainly computer related subjects) and has produced an outstanding report card for the year from his normal school studies. He has a circle of close buddies who are great kids and they spend a great deal of time together - often at our house because we are the "soft" parents!!

Lauren has also done very well at school - coming first in her class. She was also assessed "gifted" during the year but for creative rather than academic qualities - how did we guess!! She does very well with her academics at school but still excels with dramatics - and takes every opportunity to practice at home - causing some exasperation (and of course, occasional delight) for the family.

And so to the boss (who do I think I am kidding?). The company had a chequered year - with a great deal of restructuring and carving out of unprofitable divisions - to the point where we ended up in June with only the original bureau division and the training division. I had a good year from a sales point of view achieving the best results for the past 5 years. However, the management focus from the shareholders point of view was to get rid of the business and this caused a great deal of frustration. They finally succeeded at the end of November and the company was sold effective 1 December. The bombshell was my retrenchment on 28 November. After 21 years I was very angry at the decision and went to the meeting with the new directors with an alternative to my retrenchment (which included appointing me as Managing Director). This gave them food for thought and it was obvious that they had been badly advised as to the value of the various staff. They then offered me a compromise position but it meant that I would forego the benefits of 21 years service. I decided to accept the retrenchment and so now, having taken a break for Christmas, am looking for a new position. There are already some interesting opportunities on the horizon.

1994 will be very exciting for us - whether or not anything happens (if nothing happens as regards my job it will be equally exciting for the bank!) and you will have to hold your breath until later in the year to hear more. As I write we have not received many of the usual Christmas missives and are hoping it is just the usual efficiency of the postal service.

Have been having a few braais with Holly + Mel + Lyn Mattison - often talk of PE days when we are together - do your ears burn?!

All our love
Tony, Cheryl, Ryan + Lauren