

Ana Woolf

Outlook and the Bobe

LETTER 1: NOSTALGIA, BUT...

I have always obstinately longed for the past in which we wrote letters and, more importantly, waited for an answer to our letters; a past which we seem to have lost in the vortex of rushing time we are caught in. What has happened to them? Where are they? What have they turned into? We no longer have the tickling sensation in our tummy while waiting for an important letter or that impulse that made us look twice a day in our mailbox and the disappointment of there being "nothing for us"; and that inexplicable happiness that made our heart beat three times faster when finding the envelope with such a valuable gift inside. Where do these sensations go when letters no longer arrive as they used to?

I have always obstinately longed for the time when, thanks to the handwriting, I could perceive the heart rhythm of those who sent me their words locked in a piece of paper. It reached me and I myself sent the pulsation and emotion of the moment in which I was writing. I told myself: this kind of life is lost for ever. I am now receiving and printing - as so many other people in the world - electronic letters: comfortable, effective and quick e-mails. I see nothing of what I saw before and the tremble in my tummy while waiting for a wished for answer lasts only the time it takes to open up my Outlook. But, in short, there they are and there I let them stay, understanding their particular way of following the rhythm of the current necessities, in contrast to the very essence of the *letter* I long for.

But... April 2nd 2008 arrives. In the morning an e-mail from my mother (who at over eighty years old, living in Buenos Aires, has learned to use a computer to communicate with her daughter in Denmark - here is an advantage of those electronic letters, immediately shortening time and space) tells me that she received an answer to a first e-mail sent to the webpage of her native town Moses Ville. I will

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call this email "Letter from Juanita and Mario".

LETTER 2: MY BOBE THE MIDWIFE

I am a descendant of a family of immigrants who came to Argentina in search of the Promised Land. They dreamt of having a home and their own land. Their faces were wrinkled and stained from the sun; their hands were big and strong from ploughing and tilling the earth. They had to learn a new language: Spanish. "He is Jewish! But he is good."

As an old lady, my Bobe, my mother's mother used to keep bread in a bag for days and days, a reminder of the great poverty of her childhood. She was a midwife and she always used to say to me: "If everybody knows a lot, I must know more!"

This is the beginning of my performance *Seeds of Memory*, directed by Julia Varley, in homage to many absences, both of a personal kind and of my country. In the same performance I speak of those immigrant people and of a female role-model, as my Bobe, Matilde Wulff of Weinschelbaum, my mother's mother, was for me. She married, worked and raised two children, she didn't neglect her husband and when the children were already teenagers she decided to finish her primary and secondary studies and enter university: she wanted to become a midwife. From then on Bobe Matilde became the village midwife, Moses Ville's midwife. She always told me stories of women giving birth, of privations and poverty, of rainy nights when they would come to get her in a *Sulky* because a baby was coming ahead of time.

LETTER 3: ANOTHER SEED

From: Ana <mailto:anawoolf@odinteatret.dk>
Sent: Friday 4 April 2008 14.23

To: Julia Varley
Subject: Seeds history complement

Hola Julia

Here I send you a very strange and beautiful email that moved me. It has to do with *Seeds* or rather with my Bobe, my mother's mother, who, as you know, was a midwife (she brought children into the world...). The first time that she travelled to Israel and went to a kibbutz of Argentineans she told me she had met with people who said to her: "You brought me into this world, Matilde..." They were from her town; a Jewish colony in Argentina called Moses Ville, with Jews who had escaped from the pogroms of Russia and also of Germany.

Some days ago my mother sent a message to the webpage of the village where she was born, Moses Ville, and she received this surprise that I send you below. It is a nice story and it gave me an image and a title for a future performance with more people. It will be about Jewish exiles, escapees, perhaps heading for a colony like Moses Ville and it will be called: *The Midwife of Moses Ville*. This for the time being...

Kisses and enjoy the email and the story
Ana

LETTER 4: JUANITA AND MARIO

From: Juanita y Mario
[<mailto:juanitaymario@xxx.de>]
Sent: Thursday 3 April 2008 11.25
To: madreselva1923@xxx.com.ar
Subject: Your message on the webpage of Moses Ville

Dear Mrs. Weinschelbaum,

I read your communication on the webpage of Ms. Ville. It moved me a lot. Your Mother brought me into the world on



A Jewish immigrant family photograph including Ana Woolf's Bobe, in Moses Ville.
Photo: Weinschelbaum archive

August 13th 1939; and here I am still... They say that it was a very difficult birth; your mother requested the shift doctor's help, my father went to get him, but the good physician (I forgot his name) refused to come, because he had a family party at home. So there! One could behave so infamously with a poor family of German Jews escaped from the holocaust; surely he would not have refused to treat the Waxenberg, Bloch, Trumper or Schlaen families because it would have been bad for him. Fortunately, with her know-how and expe-

rience your Mother managed all by herself.

It was my mother's first time and she was anxious (thirty-eight years old). You surely know what this meant in those days. I would very much like to know about you, about where you live and what age your Mother reached. I pray she had a long and beautiful life. I greet you with a lot of respect and affection,

Dr. Med. Mario Frank
doctor paediatrician, child endocrinologist
1947-59: Moses Ville, 1959-70: Cordoba,
1970 until the present: Aachen, Germany

EPILOGUE: MATILDE'S DAUGHTER, MY MOTHER BEATRIZ

Von: Beatriz Zeigner
[mailto:madreselva1923@yahoo.com.ar]
Gesendet: Donnerstag, 3. April 2008 21:11
An: Juanita and Mario
Betreff: Re: Their message in Moses' pg.web Ville

Dear Juanita and Mario,

I feel excited when reading your letter. It is as if I have received a gift from the sky; I thank you so much for the touching words written about my mother, I remember that, in the time to which you refer, she had up to three childbirths a day and the new German mothers had very long and difficult childbirths, sometimes she assisted three women in the same day, travelling by *Sulky*. The village doctor was called Rinski and his behaviour surprises me a lot as he was a beautiful person. My mother was an admirable woman, the sun always shone for her, she lived to be eighty-eight years old supported by the love for her children and grandchildren. I live in Buenos Aires, I am eighty-three years old, I love reading and am very informed thanks to the internet that puts me in contact with the world. The main thing is to be a good person, to do good and enjoy every day. I send you my love and good wishes that your dreams are achieved in the company of your loved ones,

Beatriz

I too, the granddaughter, wrote them an e-mail, an electronic letter that I began to look at with different eyes. And I also received an immediate and speedy e-mail answer. I printed it and I keep it in a folder as something very valuable, just like any one of those letters that I received with so much desire because - although it doesn't allow me to see the pulsation of the hand of the

person who wrote it, although it 'steals' from me a waiting time that is unrecoverable - it allows me to awaken the memory of a fragment of a past whose existence I ignored. It allows me to enrich my world recovering a piece of my history that lived locked in the memory of a person who until today I didn't even know existed. It gives back to me a fragment of another loved person's life, of my Bobe's.

Finally, the daughter, the granddaughter, Juanita and Mario, without knowing each other, have all escaped for some instants from our time thanks to the speedy technology and each of us in our own way was able to get back in touch with the memories and illusions of a time when one still travelled on a *Sulky* and when Outlook was not even dreamt of.

Translated from Spanish by Julia Varley

ANA WOOLF (Argentina/Denmark) is a teacher, actress and director. Ana collaborates with Odin Teatret in Denmark, Voix Polyphoniques in France and Teatro di Nascosto in Italy. She is artistic director of Uzume, a theatre group born at Nice University and co-founder of Magdalena 2nd Generation, a Latin American Network of Women in Contemporary Arts. She is a member of *Voix de femmes*, an international network of women related to missing people and Human Rights Associations, based in Belgium. Ana Woolf keeps touring her solo performance *Seeds of Memory* and has recently premiered *White Is the Night*, both directed by Julia Varley.