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PESACH 2017



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ISSN 0021 • 6313



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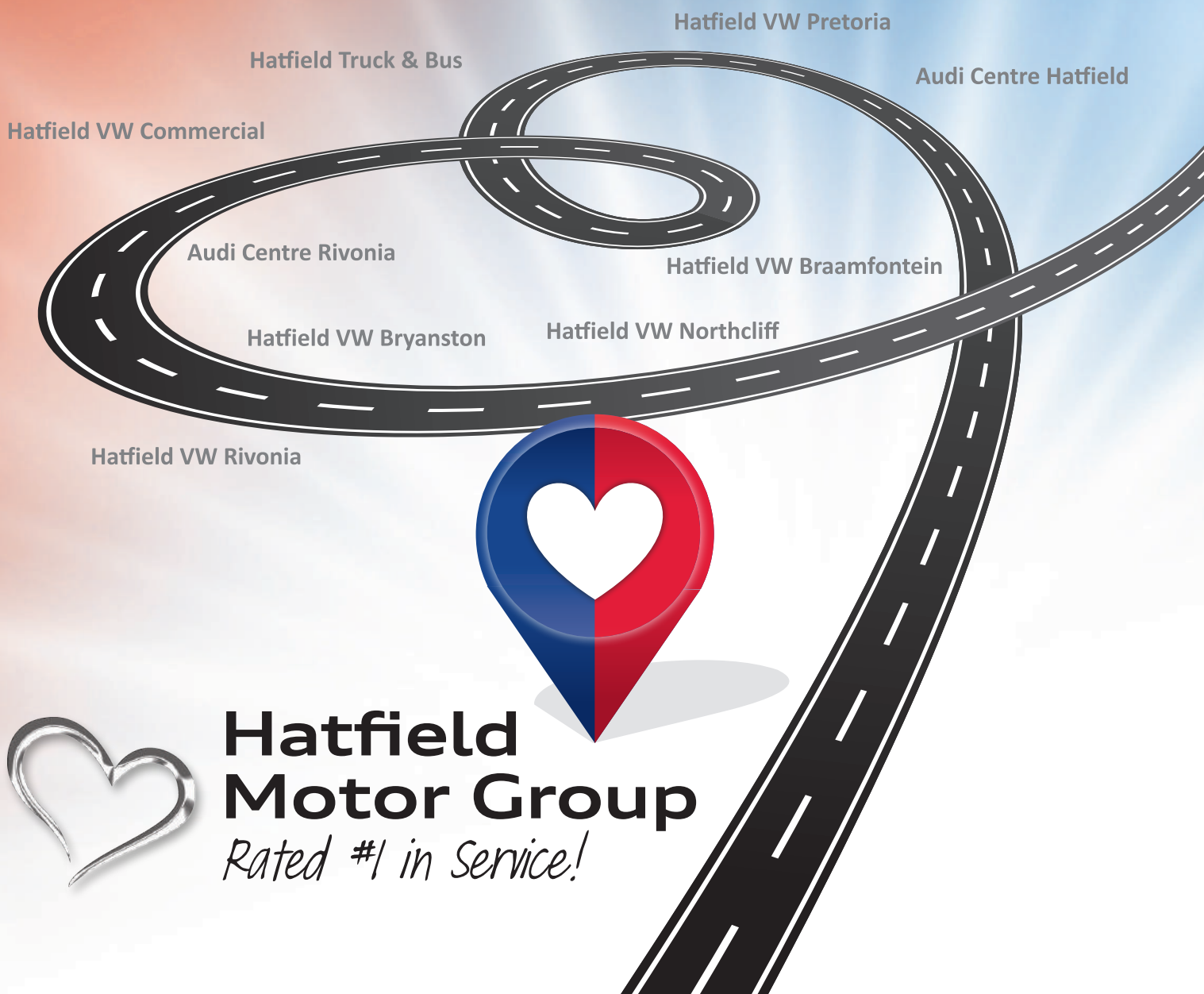
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JEWISH AFFAIRS

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011 645 2583

TYPESETTING/PRINTING – Bookpress, Johannesburg

© South African Jewish Board of Deputies 2015

Permission to reprint material from JEWISH AFFAIRS should be applied for from

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies

JEWISH AFFAIRS is published 3 times annually

Annual subscription R150 including VAT and postage

Overseas Subscriptions R300

Postal Address: PO Box 87557, Houghton 2041

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JEWISH AFFAIRS

VOL. 72 ♦ NO. 1 ♦ PESACH 2017

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WITH GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA: SONJA SCHLESIN

*

Harriet Feinberg

Here's a question you've probably never contemplated: What did Gandhi think about Yiddish? The answer, which casts light on the complex relations between Jews and other groups in pre-World War I South Africa, is my prelude to Sonja Schlesin and her extraordinary eight years with Gandhi.

Gandhi did think about Yiddish because South African Jews campaigned to categorize Yiddish as a European language so as to differentiate Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants from those who were Indian or Chinese.

This campaign arose because the white population was looking for a bureaucratic way to restrict Indian and Chinese immigration that would not be racist on its face. In 1902, the Cape Parliament devised and passed an immigration law stating that immigrants had to be able to fill out an application in a European language.¹ Some in the Jewish community were concerned that Yiddish, although structurally a European language, appeared somewhat suspect because it is written in the Hebrew alphabet and read from right to left, and hence might be classified as non-European and used by those who disliked Jews to restrict Jewish immigration. They launched and, in 1906, won a campaign to have Yiddish officially designated as a European language; this proviso exempted Jewish immigrants, the majority of whom were Yiddish-speaking Jews from Lithuania, from possible exclusion.²

A major campaigner was the lawyer Morris Alexander. He and his wife Ruth Schechter Alexander, daughter of Solomon Schechter,

were both staunch Gandhi supporters; Gandhi even stayed at their Cape Town home on his very last night in South Africa before embarking for India.³

Yet Morris Alexander fought with all his lawyer's skills to get Yiddish specifically included in the bill that stated that immigrants had to write an application in a European language. As a white European, he could advocate *for* the rights of Indians but resist any law that *classified* Jews with Indians and Chinese. That was a 'no-no'. This double advocacy coexisted in the same person. He was indeed a 'Jew in the crosshairs.'

Gandhi felt that the effort to declare Yiddish European was disingenuous. He first called attention to the question in June 1903 in his weekly newspaper *Indian Opinion* in a short piece interestingly entitled 'Is Yiddish an Eastern Language?'⁴ His comments in 1906 on the Jewish success in designating Yiddish a European language were bittersweet⁵; subsequent issues of *Indian Opinion* dealt with the issue in various ways, which included printing the texts of the relevant legal passages.⁶

In 1909, still musing about these matters, Gandhi invoked his ace in the hole: the Sassoons. About Sir Edward Sassoon, who at that time sat in the House of Commons, he wrote "his grandparents lived in Bagdad and Bombay, wore Asiatic costumes, and were never regarded in any other light than as Asiatics".⁷ Yiddish might indeed be a European language, but Gandhi *knew*, not from reading it in a book but from his life, that not all Jews were white Europeans. Indeed, he knew about the Sassoons long before he met the Litvaks of South Africa. Gandhi thought of the Jews as bridging East and West. My interpretation from the tone of these writings is that maybe he felt rather disappointed, maybe exasperated, maybe resentful, that the Jewish communal leaders, rather than join with the Indians and Chinese to oppose this discriminatory legislation, instead worked to exempt Jewish immigrants from it. Individual Jews, especially the lawyer Henry Polak and the architect Hermann Kallenbach were among Gandhi's closest friends and supporters, but the Jewish

Harriet Feinberg's interest is in international feminism in the pre-World War I years, and particularly in activist Jewish women. She first came across Sonja Schlesin while researching the three months that international suffrage leaders Aletta Jacobs and Carrie Chapman Catt spent in South Africa in 1911 encouraging women to organize. This article is an adaptation of a talk given at the Association for Jewish Studies conference in December 2106 as part of a panel entitled "Jews in the Crosshairs of Empire: Between Colonial Privilege and Anticolonial Revolt".

establishment of his day backed off from any alliance.

With that prelude the curtain goes up on Sonja Schlesin (1888-1956), the daughter of Lithuanian Jewish immigrants,⁸ who leaped over all these distinctions and was one of the very few whites of that era who lived a multiracial life, including not only protests and meetings but friendships, work, and fun. Besides her closeness with the Indian immigrant community, I discovered that she had some social relationships with black Africans. That was even more unusual.

For eight years - from the time she was eighteen until she was twenty-six - Schlesin was immersed in Gandhi's circle and made an exceptional contribution to his efforts in South Africa. But after he returned to India in 1914, her life changed completely. He became 'Mahatma Gandhi' of worldwide fame while she sank into obscurity, except among Gandhi scholars. I hope to bring her back into the light.

Young Sonja Schlesin was recommended to Gandhi, who needed a new secretary for his Johannesburg law office, by his very close Jewish friend, Hermann Kallenbach.⁹ She could take shorthand with lightning speed and soon moved into ever larger roles, embracing and participating in his movement of nonviolent resistance.



Sonja Schlesin with M K Gandhi and Hermann Kallenbach, 2013

During Sonja's years with Gandhi he led many protests against injustices affecting Indian immigrants, leading up to the huge marches and protests of 1913 when he and many others practicing *satyagraha*¹⁰ went to prison. Providing, even in condensed form, an account of the tumultuous events of that period is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, I prefer to present six vignettes of Sonja, three of public protest and engagement with the injustices of the time, and three 'backstage' moments portrayed in private letters.

On to the first vignette: Sonja Schlesin prepared a stirring speech for a rally of over 2500 Indians and their supporters

on New Year's Day, 1908, at the Hamidia Mosque in Fordsburg, Johannesburg, to protest discriminatory legislation. Gandhi delivered the speech for her. Here are a few lines: "But I implore you not to flinch from the hardships which now confront you, not to falter at the shoals ahead Let me remind you of a similar crusade now being waged by my sisters in England. I refer to the suffragettes. For the sake of a principle they are prepared to lose their all, to brave innumerable trials ... If delicately nurtured women can do this, will hardy men, inured to toil, do less?"¹¹ She was nineteen years old when she wrote that.

The second vignette comes from the memoir of Gandhi's great-nephew Prabhudas Gandhi, who got to know Sonja when he was twelve and living at Phoenix, an interracial, interfaith community Gandhi established in the countryside outside Durban.¹² The community had a school. Sonja spent considerable time there teaching and helping out when she wasn't managing Gandhi's Johannesburg law office.

"About a dozen of us from Phoenix school were walking to Durban. We reached the tramlines after we had covered 8 out of the 12 miles distance. Miss Schlesin was chaperoning us. She was an exceptionally courageous, fair-minded and intelligent person. It was because of her that the train conductor was unable to manhandle us. I remember that Ramdas Kaka was greatly hurt at the insulting manner of the whites and it was with difficulty that Miss Schlesin was able to pacify us".¹³

So here is Sonja first walking eight miles with a group of Indian teenagers, probably all boys. Then, when they board the tram to travel the rest of the distance, she seeks simultaneously to keep the conductor from roughing up the students while keeping the latter from shouting angry remarks at the conductor and the white passengers. All this by a girl still in her early twenties.

The third vignette is a letter Sonja wrote in 1912 to a railway official after receiving a written reprimand for refusing a train conductor's request that she move to a 'white' car. At the time of that request, she was with a group of Indian women en route to a meeting. An exchange of letters ensued, which Gandhi published in *Indian Opinion*. In the last of her three replies to the official's three reprimands she wrote, "My work throws me greatly with non-European people, and I am bound to state that I shall be obliged to disregard requests to separate from friends with whom I may be traveling ... I trust, therefore, that you will be good enough to issue instructions that there shall be no interference in cases such as mine."¹⁴

In all three of these vignettes - the speech at the Hamadia mosque, the scene on the tram to Durban, and the letter to the railway official - we see a young woman who is committed, completely determined, and prepared to speak out where necessary. Gandhi recalled years later that she had "a character as clear as crystal and courage that would shame a warrior".¹⁵



Gandhi flanked by Hermann Kallenbach and Sonia Schlesin, photographed shortly after Gandhi's arrest on 6 November 1913

Now we'll go backstage for three more glimpses of Sonja. These are from the letters of Betty Molteno, a white liberal from a prominent South African family.¹⁶ Whenever she and her life partner Alice Greene were separated, Betty wrote to Alice almost daily. Fortunately for historians, and very fortunately for me, a selection of Betty Molteno's hard-to-decipher handwritten letters from November 1913 to January 1914 - the time of the great *satyagraha* - have recently been made accessible by a relative, Catherine Corder.¹⁷

The several glimpses of Sonia Schlesin in these letters are vivid and revealing.

Molteno, who was in her sixties in 1913, admired and supported Gandhi, and during that crucial period spent time at Phoenix.¹⁸ She spent even more time staying at another community she embraced which was only two miles away: Ohlange, the first residential school for African students, established by the noted African educator, minister and ANC founder John Dube.¹⁹ Much scholarly ink has been spilled over the somewhat prickly relationship between Gandhi and Dube, but for the young people in both institutions, walking back and forth the two miles was easy and not unusual.

Here's the first of three vignettes from

Betty Molteno's letters: "Last night - just as I was sitting down to supper with Dube and his wife, Miss West and Miss Schlesin appeared and remained a good while - It was a moonlight night [sic] - They came alone bringing a lantern with them - Presently Miss Blackburn appeared and later she, Miss West and Miss S went to Charles Dube's cottage".²⁰

You don't just drop in at dinner time and stay a few hours unless you feel comfortable with your hosts and have visited several times before. The 'Miss Blackburn' Betty Molteno mentions was an African-American teacher at Ohlange with whom she writes elsewhere that Sonja Schlesin had an intense friendship.²¹ So we see three women: Sonja, Miss West, who is a white friend from Phoenix, and Miss Blackburn, her black friend from Ohlange - going off all together to the cottage of John Dube's brother, Charles.

A second glimpse comes in a letter of 14 December, 1913. Betty Molteno is in Johannesburg looking for John Dube and bringing a handwritten poem she has written about Ohlange for him to read. She writes to Alice that she went to the office of Rustumjee,²² "to find not him but Miss Schlesin - Down we sit in the little bureau and I dictate 'Ohlange Heights' and the clever girl's fingers play upon the stops [word unclear] and in no time the poem is typed - So rapid has she been that I take courage to ask her to type 'Phoenix' and soon that is also typed in purple ink - I depart."²³

This anecdote portrays Sonja as a 'go to' person. I picture Betty seeing her and thinking, 'Aha! Sonja could type this.' She does, at amazing speed. Then 'Could you perhaps type something else?' Of course. Sonja whips off typing two poems from dictation in no time in someone else's office when requested by someone who is not her employer.

One more letter of 12 January 1914 takes us behind the scenes to the preparation of flower garlands for some Muslim women who had been imprisoned during the great *satyagraha* and are about to be released. "I noticed that several bunches of cut flowers had been deposited upon the long table and I wondered what was to become of them. Finally Sonja Schlesin came in and Thambi Naidoo and the flowers I found were to make garlands for the Mohammedan ladies who are to return this afternoon [she reports on several conversations] Meanwhile S Schlesin went on ripping off with a great pair of garden shears head after head from the bunches of pink carnations that lay upon the table and a fine looking Indian who had come in called for needle and thread and

proceeded to make the garlands.”²⁴

I love this passage that pictures Sonya chopping off the stems while an Indian threads the pink blossoms into necklaces. She was at the heart of this massive movement, her role ranging from simple tasks like this to large-scale organization and management, and Gandhi did not hesitate to give her major responsibilities while he was in prison.

There are many tributes to her services by Gandhi and others, but I especially like this one from Gandhi biographer Ramachandra Guha: “The most steadfast woman supporter of the *satyagraha*, however, was Gandhi’s secretary, Sonja Schlesin. In times of peace, she dealt patiently - not to say heroically - with her employer’s indecipherable scrawl, his eccentric work and eating habits, and his many and various clients. In times of strife she was called upon to urge and mobilize the women” - and so on for two pages.²⁵

After Gandhi returned to India in 1914, Sonja Schlesin’s life changed completely. She went back to school, obtained a BA and MA from the University of the Witwatersrand and became a high school Latin teacher in Krugersdorp, a mining town near Johannesburg. There she remained, living alone and in later years considered eccentric, the rest of her life. She wrote no memoir and amazingly, even after Gandhi became world famous no one ever came to interview her about her years with him or did an oral history. She periodically corresponded with Gandhi but they never saw one another again.²⁶ No one will ever know what went on with her inwardly after her whole enveloping vibrant community essentially dissolved.²⁷ Still, for those eight glorious years I think she deserves a place in the pantheon of Jewish women who made a difference in the world.



Sonja Schlesin as a school teacher in

Krugersdorp

I’ll conclude with a mystery. I first learned of Sonja’s existence from a passage in the diary of American suffrage activist Carrie Chapman Catt, who spent three months in South Africa in 1911. In her account of the day she met Gandhi, she described his secretary as a ‘Russian Jewess.’ Catt had been in Johannesburg only two days. So who had already characterized Sonja to her that way? I’ll probably never know, but to me it shows that although Sonja had left traditional Judaism and found a totally different community, to Catt’s white Christian liberal supporters she was still not quite ‘one of us’, still in her own way a “Jew in the crosshairs”.

Acknowledgements

I could not have prepared this paper without the earlier research of Gandhi scholar George Paxton. He searched for all available documents and primary sources concerning Sonja Schlesin, and wrote his short biography at a time when he could still question some people who had known her in her later years. He has been very encouraging and helpful.

I am also very grateful for the generously shared bibliographical suggestions of Peter Limb, and for the advice and support of Veronica Belling, Karen Harris, Heather Hughes, and Thomas Weber.

ADDITIONAL READING

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Mahatma Gandhi and Hermann Kallenbach. Delhi, Orient Blackswan, 2012.

"Sonja Schlesin 1921-43", pp. 16-17 of Chapter Five in a history of Krugersdorp High School compiled by Sharon Farrell

NOTES

- 1 "Prohibited immigrants shall mean and include any person who when asked to do so by any duly authorized officer shall be unable through deficient education to himself to write out and sign in the characters of any European language an application to the satisfaction of the Minister" (Act 47 of 1902). Cape Town was the main port of entry for immigrants.
- 2 Alexander, Enid. *Morris Alexander: A Biography*, Juta, Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1953, pp25-36.
The Immigration Act of 1906 (Act 30) contained a proviso to section 26: "for the purpose of this subsection Yiddish shall be accepted as a European language." Between 1902 and 1906 Jewish organizations pushed, on the whole successfully, for an informal exemption.
- 3 Morris Alexander's photo appears in the *Golden Number of "Indian Opinion" 1914: Souvenir of the Passive Resistance Movement in South Africa*. Facsimile edition, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, Africana Book Collectors, 1990 [hereafter *IO*], published to celebrate the successes of the 1913 *satyagraha* (roughly meaning "truth in a firm cause", as the Indian Passive Resistance Movement was known). The caption reads "the Jewish M.L.A. of the Castle division of Capetown, who has eloquently and at all times urged just treatment of Indians" This publication includes a number of group photos of historic interest and several cartoons; there are seven individual photos of Jews, including Sonja Schlesin, Henry Polak and Hermann Kallenbach.
- 4 He continues "This question is puzzling the Hebrew community of the Cape...", *IO* 11 June, 1903, p3.
- 5 Entitled "Gratitude for Privileges" the text reads: "A letter has been addressed, on behalf of the Jewish community of Capetown, to a prominent Jewish member of the Cape Assembly, [Morris Alexander] expressing gratitude for his actions in obtaining the recognition by the House of Assembly, by a unanimous vote, of Yiddish as a European language, in connection with the administration of the Immigration Act. We are very glad that the Jewish community should have been freed from a galling restriction. But we take leave to point out that the Cape House of Assembly, by its actions, has opened wide the door to the immigration of an alien population, whereas, by its non-recognition of the great Indian languages...the Cape has ruled out subjects ... who had, by the Queen's Proclamation, been promised equal liberties with their white fellow subjects." *IO*, 30 June, 1906.
- 6 Nine issues of *IO* between June 1906 and December 1907 mention the maneuvering about Yiddish in some way.
- 7 He further wrote: "But it is a little difficult to understand how our contemporary can fairly claim European origin for Jewish people. One flagrant case comes to mind ... of Sir Edward Sassoon, a descendent of a Beni-Israelite family hailing from Bombay ... Undoubtedly he would, according to the *Jewish Chronicle*, be entitled to describe himself as a European ... With all deference to the opinion of Mr De Waal, we cannot understand how a race of Asiatic origin, or almost pure blood, exclusive, and distinct, can claim to call itself European, whatever its length of residence in the Western continent." *IO*, 26 June, 1909, p274.
- 8 Sonja's parents were Isidor Schlesin and Helena Dorothy (Rosenberg) Schlesin ... Isidor was born in Plungian, Lithuania. At some point the Schlesins moved to Moscow, where Sonja was born on 6 June, 1888. When she was four, the family immigrated to South Africa, arriving in Cape Town in June 1892. See Paxton, George, *Sonja Schlesin, Gandhi's South African Secretary*, Glasgow, 2006, pp3-7.
- 9 Kallenbach was acquainted with Sonja and her family because relatives of her mother's came from the same Lithuanian town he did, Neustadt.
- 10 See note 3.
- 11 The text of the speech is in CWMG Vol 8:47 and also in Paxton, p10. Gandhi greatly admired the suffragettes but objected when they turned to violent tactics. I have read four explanations of why Sonja didn't deliver the speech herself: she was too shy; her father objected; Gandhi was sensitive to the religious scruples of the audience; he gave her speech in Gujarati.
- 12 Phoenix was first established in 1904 and gradually developed to include homes, a school, a clinic and the printing press that produced *Indian Opinion*. Gandhi's second cooperative colony, Tolstoy Farm, was established in 1910 near Johannesburg. Schlesin and another Jewish woman, Mrs. Vogt, hosted a lively picnic party there for several hundred Indian children, their families, and other guests. "A Great Day at Tolstoy Farm" (*IO*, 31 December, 1910, p1).
- 13 Prabhudas Gandhi, *My Childhood with Gandhi*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1957, p104. Paxton quotes at length (pp23-5) from P. Gandhi's almost-reverent recollections about Schlesin's humor, teaching style, and independent nature.
- 14 Schlesin's three letters of 20 March, 21 April, and 9 May [from which this excerpt is taken] and the three letters of Assistant General Manager W.H. Bartlett are printed in *IO*, 31 August, 1912. White privilege does come into play as she is simply admonished while Gandhi years earlier was thrown off the train in Pietermaritzburg for refusing to leave the 'white' car.
- 15 Gandhi, MK, *An Autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth*. Boston, Beacon Press, 1993, p209.
- 16 Elizabeth Molteno (1852-1927) was the oldest child of the Cape Colony's first Prime Minister, John Molteno, and grew up in a highly privileged environment. She was an ardent suffragist and feminist who supported African and Indian rights.
- 17 At this time Alice was in Cape Town while Betty had gone up to Natal where the action was. Selections from the letters are in Catherine Corder and Martin Plaut, 'Gandhi's Decisive South African 1913 Campaign: A Personal Perspective from the Letters of Betty Molteno', *South African Historical Journal*, 2013, 1-33.
- 18 Her first mention of Schlesin is in a passage reporting what she has found out during an evening visiting Phoenix: "All the big ones are in prison. Mr. Gandhi was first imprisoned at Dundee....Kallenbach and Polak are each at different prisons. Mrs Gandhi and her younger children

- are at Maritzburg. Miss Schlessin [sic] is at Phoenix, a very fine-looking woman; quite young, evidently a Jewess", 25 November 1913 [Box 31]
- 19 On John Dube (1871-1946), who was influenced by his years at Oberlin and by Booker T. Washington, see Heather Hughes, *The First President: A Life of John L. Dube, Founding President of the ANC*. Jacana Media, 2011. Ohlange was established in 1900 and after a difficult first few years was flourishing at the time Molteno visited, offering several hundred students industrial and general education.
- 20 Letter of 5 December, 1913, quoted on p17 in Corder and Plaut. Schlesin's ongoing connection with Ohlange is evident in an article in *Ilanga* the following summer about the graduation ceremony: "Two special prizes were kindly given by Miss Schlessin..." Issue of 10 July, 1914.
- 21 Letter of 14 January, 1914, quoted in Corder and Plaut, p17 n. 84. Katherine Blackburn was a missionary teacher at Ohlange. "The Arrival of Miss Blackburn" a 1911 article in the Ohlange paper, *Ilanga Lase Natal*, reports that she is "a graduate of Wilberforce University and also of the Union Missionary Training Institute in Brooklyn" who has spent four and a half years of missionary work in the Congo (22 December, 1911, p4). A later article, 'Ohlange School', reports that a new building is going up for a girls' school which is to be "under the able management of Miss. K. Blackburn" (27 June, 1913)
- Further evidence that Schlesin's had a warm connection with Ohlange appears in an article in *Ilanga* describing the school's July 1914 graduation ceremony: "Two special prizes were kindly given by Miss Schlessin..." (10 July, 1914). Katherine Blackburn left Ohlange in 1915, returned to the United States, and came back to South Africa a few years later to continue her missionary work. She became general secretary of the colored branch of the YWCA Cape Town and died, much beloved for her devotion, in 1925.
- 22 Parsi Rustomjee was a successful businessman and a stalwart Gandhi supporter who served several terms in prison under very difficult conditions.
- 23 Molteno's poem "The Ohlange Heights" appears in *Ilanga*, 19 December, 1913, p4. Over fifty lines long and written in flowery language, it would have been quite a challenge to type from dictation 'in no time'!
- 24 This letter and the letter of 25 November, 1913 quoted above (note 15) were sent to me by Catherine Corder and are not included in her article. Two relevant articles are in *IO*. In "The Release of Mrs Mehtab" (14 January, 1914), we find "Miss Schlessin garlanded the ladies on behalf of the Transvaal Indian Women's Association...." And in "Release of the Transvaal Ladies (28 January, 1914), "Miss Schlessin.... presented the ladies with beautiful bouquets."
- 25 Guha, Ramachandra, *Gandhi Before India*. New York, Random House, 2013, pp388-390
- 26 An insightful discussion of their correspondence, with quotes, is in Weber, Thomas. *Going Native: Gandhi's Relationships with Western Women*. New Delhi, Lotus Collection, 2011, pp61-68. Gandhi expressed the hope in several letters that she would visit and help him in India, but she never came. As late as 1945 the two still wrote of their hopes of meeting at the peace conference in San Francisco. She survived him by eight years, dying in 1956.
- 27 Perhaps the sudden death of her sixteen-year-old brother Robert Schlesin in 1915 contributed to her withdrawal from public life. With regard to her bereavement, the following item appeared in the 14 July issue of *IO*, under 'News in Brief': "The sympathy of the Indian community will go out to Miss S. Schlesin and family in the sudden death on the 4th instant of her younger brother, at the early age of 16 years. Numerous members of the Indian community in Johannesburg have expressed sympathy with the bereaved family." It also might well have been that had she had achieved her fervent wish to become a lawyer, her post-Gandhi life would have been different. On 24 February, 1909, she applied to be an articled clerk in his office, as Henry Polak and several others had done before her. Gandhi strongly supported her, but she was refused on the grounds that "the articling of women is entirely without precedent in South Africa and was never contemplated by the law" *Transvaal Leader*, 26 April, 1909, quoted in Paxton, p14.



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BENEATH THE MINYAN – A CLOSE MISS

*

Steven Mark Katzew

Much has been written about the ten Springboks who make up a so-called ‘*Minyan*’ of Jewish rugby players who have represented South Africa in the international arena. This statistic certainly ranks high in the annals of Jewish life in South Africa. The careers of most of these players spanned eras of complete domination of the sport at international level by South Africa. Such was their influence that, according to popular legend, it was once regarded as an imperative to select a Jewish Springbok as a lucky omen for the team.

With this kind of influence at the highest echelons of the game, it is not surprising that there has been a wellspring of Jewish rugby players, coaches, selectors and referees at all levels of the game in South Africa and, on the media side, statisticians and commentators too. This is not well documented, however, and it is therefore necessary to resort to word of mouth to acquire information on Jewish participation and involvement, from school level through to university, provincial age group, and club and open provincial rugby.

It was originally my intention to cast the net far and wide in order to provide a full picture of Jewish involvement in the sport at all these levels in a single article. However, I soon realised that it would be impossible to trace from oral sources an accurate account of the phenomenon. Indeed, so far back in time and so great are the numbers that even if I were to confine myself to open level provincial players, I would risk doing an injustice to players and other personalities whom I would almost certainly overlook. The period under review would need to extend at least as far back as 1931, with the selection for the upcoming tour of the British Isles of the first-ever Jewish rugby Springbok, Morris Zimerman, at the time a student at the University of Cape Town and a member of its rugby football club. The elevation of the first Jewish rugby player to international level is an indication of at

least a sprinkling, and probably more than that, of other Jewish players at provincial or club level at around the same time, or even from before, of whom little or no information would be available from current word of mouth sources. Moreover, chance word of mouth encounters are by nature often offhand and unreliable.

With this in mind, I decided to confine myself to my own personal reading and encounters to serialize for publication the achievements and stories of randomly selected Jewish participants in rugby in South Africa who did not make it to international level but who nonetheless left their mark on the game. Hopefully, as the list grows in print the reader will pick up the thread of a much greater picture.

Undoubtedly, foremost amongst Jewish provincial rugby players outside of those who gained Springbok colours is the Free State’s Henry Joffe. By all accounts, he was a towering figure in South African rugby in the immediate post-World War II era and was desperately unlucky not to have become a Springbok. Just how close he came to playing for his country is recorded by Andy Colquhoun and Paul Dobson in their book *The Chosen: The 50 greatest Springboks of all time* (first published 2003, 2nd edition 2011). What emerges from the book is that Joffe was the selectors’ preferred choice for the flyhalf berth against the 1949 All Blacks until the eve of the First Test in Cape Town. (From a Jewish perspective, it is a fascinating to consider that two of the ‘*Minyan*’ of Jewish Springboks, Cecil Moss and Okey Geffin, made their Test debuts in this series, the first to take place in the post-World War II era, and that had Joffe been selected as well, which was not a remote prospect ahead of the first test, a staggering 20% of that Springbok XV would have been Jewish).

Testament as to how good a player Joffe really was is that the man whom the selectors ultimately opted for instead of him in the pivotal flyhalf position was none other than Hansie Brewis, whom Colquhoun and Dobson rank twentieth in their list of greatest Springboks of all time, and whom they have also included as their reserve flyhalf (to Naas Botha) in their Greatest Springbok XV of all time. The following extracts from pages 107-

Steven Mark Katzew is a Johannesburg-based advocate. He grew up in Virginia and attended High School in Welkom, Orange Free State, going on to study Law at Rhodes University, Grahamstown. He has contributed articles on South African Jewish sporting personalities in Soul Sport, a Jewish-interest sports magazine published in Johannesburg.

108 of the book (2011 edition) are a harsh reminder of the old adage that the dividing line between success and failure, greatness and ordinary, overwhelming joy and abject disappointment is sometimes heartbreakingly hairbreadth:

By the time of those 1949 trials Brewis was 28 He'd made his name ... although it appeared that a test career might elude him as the trials week ended with Free State's Henry Joffe being the only flyhalf of the seven to attend who was nominated in the test 'probables' squad by the selectors....

...Joffe was discarded before ever pulling on the Springbok shirt following a 9-9 draw between his province [Free State] and the tourists [the All Blacks] two weeks before the first test.

He was replaced in the selectors' minds by Western Province's Dennis Fry but following Province's 6-3 defeat [by the All Blacks] on the eve of the first test in Cape Town, he too fell out of favour. Both Joffe and Fry never did win a test cap. So in came Brewis, whose greatest qualification by that time was that he had had the good fortune not to have yet faced the All Blacks ...



Henry Joffe in the match between Free State and the visiting New Zealand All Blacks, 1949. The All Black player is probably Eighth Man Lachie Grant.

So there you have it from the mouths of two of the most highly respected authorities on the game in South Africa with no cause for Jewish bias – Henry Joffe lost out on the opportunity of a Test cap by virtue of the chance misfortune of having played for Free State in a drawn match against the tourists prior to the First Test. Why, one may ask, was a draw against the mighty All Blacks reason to have doubts about the suitability of Joffe as the continued incumbent flyhalf in the Springbok 'probables'? Did he simply have a rare bad game in that match, which is certainly not evident from the result? The answers to these questions are lost in the mists of time and thus we are left with a *Minyan* of exactly ten and an outsider who had a nail-bitingly close look-in.

Further testament to the esteem in which Henry Joffe was held is the following obituary on him that appeared in *Beeld* on 22 August 1992:

Dr HENRY JOFFE (67), Junior Springbok-losskakel van die jare vyftig wat 43 keer vir die Vrystaat van 1947 tot 1951 gespeel het, is eergister skielik in Johannesburg oorlede.

Dr. Joffe was ná die SA rugbyproewe van 1949 in Pretoria die nasionale keurders se enigste losskakel in die groep van 32 spelers met die oog op die toetsreeks teen die All Blacks.

In die Vrystaat se wedstryd teen die All Blacks op Kroonstad het hy egter nie aan die verwagtinge voldoen nie en Hansie Brewis van Noord-Transvaal het die kans as losskakel gekry om te ontwikkel in een van Suid-Afrika se heel grotes.

Toe Brewis gister van Joffe se dood verneem het, was sy kommentaar: "Sy spel was soos dié van Cliff Morgan van Wallis. Met sy spoed en swenklope het hy in die 1949-proewe gemaak net wat hy wou.

"In daardie proewe was daar net een losskakel, en dit was Henry Joffe," sê die beskeie Brewis. Joffe was lid van die Junior Springbokspan wat in 1950 in die destydse Rhodesië getoer het. Hy laat sy vrou, Ann, en vier seuns, drr. Michael, Charles, Jack en Ivan, agter. Charles het as student aan Wits vir Transvaal se Rooibokke gespeel.¹

The accomplished sportswriter Chris Greyvenstein, in his monumental *Springbok Saga: A Pictorial History from 1891* (second edition, 1981), describes Hansie Brewis as the best flyhalf of his era (p139). Further on (p161), he rates Cliff Morgan, the Welsh flyhalf in the 1955 Lions team, as one of the most brilliant players ever to visit South



The 1950 Junior Springbok touring side to Rhodesia. From the top, l-r: D Retief, J Bekker, H Morkel, G Dannhauser, W Koch, E Dinkelman, S Fry, R Boyes, W Louw, H N Walker, A du Plooy, A Hummel, J Ochse, S Pienaar, H Joffe, G Woodward, Att Horak (Manager) E Norton (Captain), D Fry, O Haarhoff, A Keevy, G Muller, M Gillmer

Africa.

Such is the honour given to Henry Joffe – Hansie Brewis, the greatest flyhalf of the late 1940s-early 1950s era, which was Joffe's era too, likening Joffe's speed and side-stepping to that of Cliff Morgan, a flyhalf of a slightly later era who is rated as one of the most brilliant players to ever visit our shores.

Perhaps in the end that compliment paid by Brewis to Joffe trumped the lost nod of the Springbok selectors.

I know of no other Jewish players who came close to selection for the Springboks. There may well have been players in the distant past who narrowly missed out on selection whom I do not know of. I have received unconfirmed reports in the course of random discussions with informants of Jewish players who should have become Springboks but didn't, but no concrete evidence.

Abe Hummel of Griquas was selected together with Henry Joffe in 1950 to play for the Junior Springboks, which by definition also made him a strong candidate for higher international honours. The name Aubrey Luck has come up enough times from the mouths of reliable sources to convince me that he must certainly have been in the mix for international honours around the early 1960s. He played scrumhalf for UCT, Villagers and Western Province and represented W.P. Universities against the touring All Blacks in 1960. Ken Resnick played, as hooker, for Transvaal, but was more often than not an understudy to Robbie Barnard, who was a Springbok. This suggests that Resnick was up there with the best and may well be considered unlucky not to have gained Springbok colours.

But there were many Jewish rugby players who represented their provinces at different levels.

As a foretaste, stories abound like those of one of my co-congregants at the Chabad of Lyndhurst shul, Monty Isserow, who played prop for Transvaal Under-20 alongside two other Jewish players, Dennis Cohen and Doug Smollan, on a tour to Rhodesia in 1965. The first match of the tour was in Bulawayo against Rhodesia Under 20. Shortly into the game, tempers flared between Monty and the Rhodesia Under-20 hooker, Ivan Margolis. Blows were exchanged and the Jewish Rhodesian referee on the day, a Mr Lazarus, intervened and called Isserow and Margolis aside for a private chat. "Not nice for two Jewish boys to fight. Please no more of that!" he told them firmly.

The stories are endless. My mind is filled with the names of Jewish players spanning the Thirties all the way through to the professional era commencing in the Nineties, testimony to the wonderful association of South African Jewry with the great, passion filled sport of rugby which so fires the imagination of participants and enthusiasts alike.

NOTES

- 1 "Dr Henry Joffe (67), Junior Springbok flyhalf from the 1950s who played 43 times for Free State between 1947 and 1951, passed away suddenly in Johannesburg yesterday. Following the 1949 SA rugby trials Dr Joffe was the selectors' sole flyhalf in the group of 32 players considered with an eye to the upcoming test series against the All Blacks. In the Free State match against the All Blacks at Kroonstad, however, he did not fulfil expectations, and Hansie Brewis of Northern Transvaal gained the opportunity, as flyhalf, to develop into one of South Africa's all-time greats.

On learning of Joffe's death yesterday, Brewis commented, "His playing could be likened to that of Cliff Morgan of Wales. With his speed and sidesteps, he did pretty much what he liked in the 1949 trials". Said the self-effacing Brewis, "In those trials, there was only one flyhalf, and that was Henry Joffe".

Joffe was a member of the Junior Springboks who toured the then Rhodesia in 1950. He is survived by his wife, Ann, and four sons, doctors Michael, Charles, Jack and Ivan. As a student at Wits, Charles played for Transvaal's Rooibokke" [the Transvaal 'B' team].

“MORE THAN A SHOP”: FANNY KLENERMAN AND THE VANGUARD BOOKSHOP IN JOHANNESBURG

*

Veronica Belling

A lifelong rebel, a trade unionist and a Trotskyite, Fanny Klenerman's name is chiefly associated with the Vanguard Bookshop, iconic of leftist circles in Johannesburg during the period 1931-1974. Although her shop is often cited, most recently by Mark Gevisser in his autobiography, *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* (Jonathan Ball, 2014), its history has never been told, while its eccentric owner has been largely forgotten.¹

In 1982, Fanny dictated her story to Ruth Sack, who recorded it on to audiotape and subsequently transcribed it. At that stage Fanny was virtually blind and unable to read or write her memoirs independently. In 1988, the tapes, the transcription, and a collection of pamphlets were donated to the Department of Historical Papers at Wits University by Rose Zvi, a South African novelist now living in Sydney, Australia.² Zvi, who had met her in her shop, arranged for Ruth Sack to record her story.³ On the basis of her memoir, this article will attempt to reconstruct the story of Fanny Klenerman's life and the history of the famous Vanguard Bookshop, so that they can assume their rightful place in the history of the Left in Johannesburg.

Fanny opens her memoir with the description of an incident for which she became notorious, namely when she and seven girl friends were arrested for bathing nude in a secluded remote mountain pool near Witpootjie in the Transvaal! The women were taken to the police station, fingerprinted, and only released on the payment of a bail of £500 that they managed to raise with the help of businessman, Fred Cohen, and trade unionist, Solly Sachs.⁴ However the incident made headlines in the newspapers. All their names and addresses were published as well as the fact that Fanny was the owner of the



Fanny Klenerman, founder and director of the Vanguard Bookshop, Johannesburg

Vanguard bookshop. On sentencing them to a fine of £2 each the magistrate declared that society had done its utmost to instil in them a sense of propriety. They had built public lavatories in the veld for Africans “to prevent them defiling the soil of the veld and here ... [they] Europeans, students and intellectuals furthermore [were] indulging in disgusting practices.”

Fanny succeeded in having the verdict overturned and the fine revoked on the grounds that the place where they had bathed was remote and inaccessible and could hardly be considered to be in the public eye. In order to substantiate her claim, her attorney had

Dr. Veronica Belling is the author of Bibliography of South African Jewry (1997), Yiddish Theatre in South Africa (2008), and the translator of Leibl Feldman's The Jews of Johannesburg (2007) and Yakov Azriel Davidson: His Writings in the Yiddish Newspaper, Der Afrikaner, 1911-1913 (2009).

the place inspected by a group consisting of the magistrate, the press and various other officials. As none of them were familiar with the secret hiking trail, they managed, with great difficulty, to get only half way down. It transpired that the police who had arrested the girls had spied on them through binoculars from an adjacent ledge. Fanny was disgusted by the narrowness of officialdom in South Africa, pointing out that nude bathing was commonplace in Europe. She and her friends continued to bathe nude in mountain pools, "observed only by monkeys and baboons".

Many felt that this incident would harm Fanny's business. However, ever true to her beliefs, she had no regrets. In her words: "I have always tried to maintain my true opinion against those obscurantists and conservatives. And so far, people of intelligence have accepted me. They regard me as a well-meaning rebel, but certainly not immoral ... [Our] real customers – who also became friends – all respected me as the owner of the best bookshop in South Africa".

Childhood years

Born in 1897 in Lutzin in the Vitebsk Province in Belarus (today Ludza, Latgale Province, Latvia), Fanny Klenerman immigrated to South Africa at the age of four or five together with her mother and older brother. They joined her father, who had arrived in Johannesburg in the late 1890s. With money scarce during the period of the South African War (1899-1902), Fanny's mother operated a small store or '*kremelke*', selling herrings, *kvas* (a popular drink made from the juice of fermented bread), pickles and brown bread. After the war the family moved to Kimberley, where Fanny's father opened a men's outfitting store. Self-educated and an accomplished Hebrew scholar who read very widely, he lost his religion but not his Jewish identity. Although they never belonged to a synagogue, Fanny's mother insisted that the family attend services on the High Holidays so that the children should not "grow up to be savages." The family supported Jewish organisations but were not Zionists.

Theirs was a Yiddish-speaking household. Fanny remembers first attending school in Kimberley not knowing a word of English, but she soon picked it up and by the age of seven or eight was an avid reader. At the age of eight Fanny became a vegetarian, having witnessed the killing of a chicken taken to be slaughtered according to Jewish law. She never again ate meat although as an adult she did eat fish for reasons of health. She was first exposed to socialist ideas by

her father, who imported *The Clarion* and other liberal and socialist newspapers from Britain. He and his friends were dedicated to socialism and to changing society and discussed these matters with Fanny. By the age of fifteen, Fanny was an accomplished public speaker and was invited to speak at the Zionist Hall on Sunday nights. She was also a great admirer of Voltaire and joined a group of Rationalists who met in Kimberley. At the University of Cape Town, where she graduated with a degree in English and History, she was a prominent speaker in the Students' Parliament and her interest in socialism was encouraged by reading the New York Socialist weekly *The New Age*.

After graduating, Fanny taught at Wynberg Girls School but found the atmosphere "stuffy and repressive." She returned to Kimberley, where she was unable to find work because of her outspoken political views, expressed in letters to the local newspapers. Shortly after the Rand Revolt in 1922, relying on her father's connections, she left to work for the Labour Party in Johannesburg. Within a year she broke with the Party, objecting to its industrial colour bar. Many years later she recalled: "Here we've come to a country the British stole from the Africans ... They haven't got money to go anywhere, and you're excluding them from society and bringing them down to the level of serfs. And I said 'I can't take it'".⁵

Fanny joined the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), the only multi-racial party. Together with her great friend, Eva Green, she would distribute *Umsebenzi* (The Worker) newspaper in Rooiyard, Soweto, every Friday afternoon. Fanny was only a member for a short time. In 1935, together with four others, including Eddie Roux,⁶ she was expelled for being critical of the party's policy.

On leaving the CPSA, Fanny joined the South African Workers' Party. Inspired by the literature of Leon Trotsky, this had been founded by the Lenin Club in Cape Town in 1935.⁷ A branch was established in Johannesburg that had a small membership but was very active. The Party was born out of disgust over Comintern policy, but said Fanny, people were not sufficiently politically aware to understand the differences between them and the Communists. She defined their objectives as "to organise the workers, to accept change in society, and to resist the Communist alternative." The members of the group were professional people, doctors, students and intellectuals. Because of the structure of South African society, where the workers were mostly black, they had little contact with working people and so could not influence them. The fact that none of these

groups survived, says Fanny, was sufficient indication that there could be no such thing as a 'workers group' of intellectuals.

South African Women Workers' Union

While working for the Labour Party, Fanny decided to enrol for legal studies in the extramural program at Wits University. She continued for two years, until she realised that these courses would not assist her in her chosen work, which was to organise working class women who lacked any means of safeguarding their positions as workers. After the 1922 Strike, wages fell sharply and there was a large movement of women from the country into the city where poverty was rife. The average monthly wage for working women was £7, a salary on which it was impossible to survive. Following the strike, the trade union movement was in chaos and Fanny determined to do something about this.

Together with Eva Green (like herself, a teacher, humanist and socialist), she determined to form a union, and thus the South African Women Workers' Union (SAWWU) came into being. The work was difficult as they had no form of transport, and took trams where possible to factory yards. They spoke to the women on their breaks, often in the face of strong resistance from the factory owners, who on occasion threatened to set their dogs on them should they return. Fanny managed to gain ground in some smaller factories and in addition was supported by the owner of Rondi's, a large factory, whose Italian owner, Mr Rondi, a socialist, was not averse to enrolling his workers in a trade union.

They explained to the women their rights as workers, the wages due to them, the morning breaks they should be granted and the paid holidays to which they were entitled. The main aim was to raise their wages. Factory owners reacted in two ways. The more pleasant agreed but felt that they just couldn't afford such wages while others simply refused to allow their workers to join a trade union. In such a case they would advise the women that if they could not achieve anything individually they must achieve it en masse.

Men's wages tended to be better than that of the women's and in several cases the men opposed the idea of a women's union fearing that their wages would be reduced to allow for the raising of wages for women. Fanny assured them that if this occurred they were free to apply to the Wage Board. More and more women joined the Union, particularly from Rondi's factory, and they made application to the Wage Board. As a result, women's wages were upscaled, a new

scale introduced, and workers were graded. This gave the SAWWU a great boost. Shop stewards were appointed to enrol members and to collect fees and the Union flourished.

As a trade union official, Fanny earned £17 a month, a very small amount. She shared a flat in Doornfontein with two friends, thus managing to live reasonably comfortably. They entertained friends and members in the living-cum-dining room where they also invited people to address their meetings. They would visit the women at their residences, where they were often sharing four to a room and living and cooking cooperatively.

Their work was universally praised. Eva, being a teacher, had to work quietly and surreptitiously and could not take an official position in the union. She would come after school and do whatever was needed - typing or recovering back pay or holiday pay from employers and sometimes threatening to sue. On occasion they would have to invoke the Labour Bureau, who would take on cases where the proper wages were not being paid. This Union continued for a few years until it was absorbed by a larger Union.

Fanny says about this period of her life:

During the course of my life, I have been associated with very many occupations, some more interesting than others. But speaking generally, I devoted myself to causes which were close to my interests. Frequently working with organisations, I became enlightened about how politics worked, and I grew disillusioned and also very sad that most of my ideals were not only not current in our society but impossible to be introduced into this capitalist system of exploitation and expression of greed and restriction of ideas.

The ICU and Night Schools

Fanny worked in the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Unions (ICU), not as a paid official but as a teacher of English to Africans who had not had any education. It was a difficult task. She had to use her own initiative to devise her own system. There was a night school for those who had already attended school and had a rudimentary knowledge of the English language; and a school with various classes, such as rudimentary arithmetic, for those who had had no education whatsoever. Fanny did everything in her power to enrich the experience of her students. Although refused entry to the Johannesburg Art Gallery, as it was "For whites only", on one occasion she managed to gain entry for her students to the Johannesburg Observatory.

Because of the Pass system Africans were not allowed to be in Johannesburg beyond a certain hour. One Friday, one of her pupils was arrested and kept in jail over the weekend. Distressed Fanny went to the courts to explain that her pupils worked and had no way of attending classes during the day time. The official obliged by providing her with a note that her pupils could carry indicating that they were studying at the ICU School and that they were allowed to be in the city for extended hours to allow them time to get home.

Fanny attributed the ultimate failure of the ICU to lack of control over money. Too many people had their hands in the till. When the Trade Union Council in London sent out a supervisor, one W. C. Ballinger, a Scotsman who had been associated with the Trade Union movement for many years, it was too late. Ballinger was accompanied by Winifred Holtby, a writer, ardent feminist, socialist and pacifist and a staunch campaigner for the unionisation of black workers in South Africa. She was greatly admired by Fanny.⁸

Besides teaching, Fanny also became involved in the library of the ICU, which Holtby and some other friends of the ICU had organised. It contained hundreds of books, mainly about the Labour movement in Britain and elsewhere. Fanny was dismayed at the indiscriminate lending to members who were not literate in English and at the number of valuable sets of books that went missing.

Between 1935 and 1940, Fanny also taught English to the Africans at a night school associated with the Union of Max Gordon, a good friend of hers whom she held in high esteem. Gordon, a Trotskyite and opponent of the CPSA organised several unions. By 1939, he had eleven unions representing 20 000 workers from the Joint Committee of African Workers.⁹ Fanny met him at a meeting of the Workers Party of South Africa. He rented a room in her cottage.¹⁰

The night school was located in Exploration Buildings (demolished by 1982). Classes were small but those who attended were given an opportunity to acquire reading skills and numeracy. Fanny's group had basic literacy and were official members of the trade union. She introduced them to the struggle for human rights that had been fought in the UK and in other countries; the stories of slaves, serfs, and workers without political rights, the struggles of the emerging trade unions and their fight for political rights. She organised a "Junior Class" that, she says, were devoted to her. These classes ended in 1940 when Max Gordon was interned for opposing the war and the committee collapsed along with his unions.

Frank Glass; the Jewish Workers' Club

In January 1927, Fanny married Frank Glass, who for a number of years had been the Secretary of the Tailors' Union – that is the Bespoke Tailors, because this excluded the Garment Workers. He was a talented speaker and a journalist. They met at the Trade Union Congress in Cape Town, where Fanny was a delegate for the SAWWU. They both continued with their work in the trade union movement after their marriage. Unfortunately, beset by financial problems, their marriage soon floundered.

At first they continued to live in Stewart's building in Braamfontein in a comfortable flat, taking in a lodger, a Russian immigrant seamstress and milliner in order to make ends meet. After a while they decided to move to a less expensive semi-detached cottage in Van der Merwe Street, where they rented a room to a Scottish immigrant.

About a year into their marriage, Frank was obliged to resign from the union. With the shadow of his resignation also falling on her, Fanny likewise resigned from her Union, the largest section of which was the Sweet Workers' Union. Even more pressed for cash, the couple were forced to give up their house and move to Pieterse Street to large rooms with a shared bathroom and little privacy.

To bring in some money, Fanny gave English lessons to the Russian Jewish immigrants who were streaming into South Africa at that time. At the same time she was approached by the Jewish Workers' Club to organise classes, held at the H.O.D. Hall, for the new immigrants. She greatly enjoyed this work. While some members had little education, others were advanced Marxists, well versed in the works of the Russian authors, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Gogol, and they were eager and intelligent learners. Her main goal was to teach them to be able to read the English newspapers to understand what was going on around them. She also travelled to Vrededorp twice a week to teach a group of Jewish women who were unable to leave their homes to attend her lessons. Fanny admired the discussion groups and other cultural activities organised by the Club, but never joined as the majority of the members were Communist sympathisers and she was not.

Frank was appointed as a bookkeeper at the ICU to inspect the branches. When this work too came to an end, desperate to earn a living they took over a tearoom in a working class district with several small factories. Fanny did not enjoy this work, and employed her housemaid to work part-time in the tearoom. After a while it became clear

that they could not make a living and they closed down the tearoom and moved to a one-bedroom apartment.

Their relationship ended when Frank decided to travel to China, although their divorce only became final in 1960. In China Frank continued his revolutionary work writing under the name of Li Fu-jen. In 1941 he left China and settled in Los Angeles, where he continued his journalistic work on the Left.¹¹ Fanny remembered standing broken-hearted at Park Station watching him depart.

Fanny now met Joe Moed, a Belgian national, who would become her partner in life as well as in the bookshop, at a meeting of Duncan Burnside, a socialist member of parliament. Joe had previously patronised Solomon's Bookshop but once he met her began coming to Vanguards. He became a good customer. When war broke out, Joe lost his job when the American steel company he worked for closed its Johannesburg branch. At Fanny's suggestion, he became her assistant. He was very capable, accurate and well informed. He moved into her house in Hancock Street. "That", says Fanny, "was the beginning of our 'more-than-friendship'".

The Vanguard Bookshop

Besides his journalistic work Frank Glass had also been running a bookshop, named Frank Glass Booksellers. To drum up customers, Fanny would drag a heavy suitcase full of books to potential clients. She was an omnivorous reader - mostly of American books on politics - and subscribed to many American magazines. In contact with publishers in the USA, she had an idea of establishing a depot in South Africa to distribute some of these political writings. They launched the business on a small scale. One of the publications they ordered, *The New Masses*, that was partly political and partly devoted to art, began attracting growing numbers of subscribers. Then she began to read the London *Sunday Times* to discover what literature was available. Slowly, the idea of the Vanguard Bookshop was born.

When Frank decided to travel to China, Fanny took over the bookshop and renamed it the Vanguard Bookshop for the Vanguard Press (1926-1988), an American left wing publishing house that published an array of books on radical topics including studies of the Soviet Union, socialist theory and politically orientated fiction by a range of writers.¹² The new bookshop opened on 17 April 1931, and on 16 June, Fanny became its director. The shop remained in Hatfield House in Eloff Street for a number of years. As the business grew, they acquired a second

space with two doors between the two. For a long time Fanny was forced to struggle on her own, unable to leave the shop from 08h30 to 17h30.

Fanny acquired a reputation as a discerning bookseller. She stocked the European classics, such as Chekhov, Strindberg and Mann and made contact with distinguished publishers who sent her catalogues. She was guided by magazines, such as the aforementioned, *New Masses*, (1926-1948), the principal cultural organ of the American Left from 1929 onwards.¹³ Thus were books that might otherwise never have reached South Africa introduced.

Fanny introduced the books (published as cheaply as possible by Victor Gollancz) of the Left Book Club. She also subscribed to a couple of Soviet newspapers, the *Moscow News*, an English language newspaper, and ordered small numbers of the Russian language newspapers, *Izvestia* (Star) and *Pravda* (Truth), and *Novi Mir* (The New World) a monthly consisting of literature, literary opinion and some philosophy. The readership was small but some students became devotees. Later Mr Solomon, a Russian Jew who owned Solomon's Bookshop, also began to stock these books and Fanny stopped her subscriptions as there was not sufficient readership for two suppliers. Apart from distributing these books, Fanny, with a few others, organised a Left Book Club discussion group. They hired a room in the Johannesburg Public Library and held regular meetings. One of the most eloquent and informed speakers was Professor John Gray from Wits University. Fanny often spoke there herself. Her chief opponent was Solly Sachs, Secretary of the Garment Workers' Union and a Communist. The Left Book Club existed for several years before fading away.

One of Fanny's greatest triumphs was the introduction of James Joyce's *Ulysses* into South Africa. They were the only bookseller in the country that stocked it as it had been widely banned. The book had been brought to her by a customer who worked for the State Department in Pretoria. She said that she sat up the whole night and spent several days reading and studying it, concluding that it would sell but in limited numbers. She sold her own first copy for £5. The book was imported from the original publisher - Sylvia Beach, at Shakespeare and Company in Paris.¹⁴

Fanny also introduced the series known as the *Modern Library*, which she felt to be better than the *Everyman Books* series. The latter emphasized old English literature, while *Modern Library* was devoted to outstanding contemporary writers. No other South African bookseller stocked the *Modern Library* books.

Her bookshop became well known all over Johannesburg and drew numerous customers to its one room on the second floor of Hatfield House. Many patrons became her ardent supporters. Writes Baruch Hirson: "This was more than a shop – it was a forum for informed political ideas, and also for the latest currents in philosophy, literature and art."¹⁵

While most customers were white, the shop attracted black shelveers, some of whom found a niche in journalism in the post-war years in such publications as *Drum*. One, Todd Matshikiza, wrote the lyrics for the musical show, *King Kong*, while another, Bloke Modisane, wrote the book, *Blame Me on History* (published after he managed to leave the country).¹⁶ Fanny employed anti-Apartheid political activists, such as Helen Joseph and Shanti Naidoo, who were banned but allowed to work. She had a Chinese assistant, who was much loved by the public.

In his book *Wasteland* (Lowry Books, 1987, pp127-8), the travel writer and journalist David Robbins quotes the reminiscences of a former Vanguard employee:

During the war ... I got a job in a bookshop, Vanguard, it was called, and it was run by perfectly crazy people - they were Trotskyites actually. Of course during those days we were heavily dependent on imported culture, on books from London and America. When consignments of new books arrived, everyone who was anyone came to browse. The shop stayed open on Saturday afternoons, and it was like a social occasion. I could name you at least fifty top people around today who all had accounts at the Vanguard ... And of course, Vanguard was an important meeting place for Black and White intellectuals. It was probably the only place they could meet in those days.

Fanny was twice invited to lecture to the Johannesburg Public Library staff on books, book selling and libraries. She presented five lectures on children's literature for CNA booksellers, later published in the journal of the Transvaal Booksellers Association. Fanny believed very strongly that children's books displaying any form of racial discrimination should be banned and was distressed that Helen Bannerman's book, *Little Black Sambo*, that portrayed a southern Indian child in a deprecating light, was available in South Africa.¹⁷

Von Brandis Street, 1939-1952

When the Hatfield premises finally became

too small, Fanny moved to Warwick House at 51 Von Brandis Street. Here, the shop occupied a large ground floor area with two very large windows for displaying books. She acquired the premises through a friend whose family owned it and who wanted her daughter to open a children's bookshop there. At her suggestion Fanny (who had already been promoting children's literature, stocking beautiful carefully selected books) moved into the premises together with the daughter. They took a room on the floor above especially for the children's books, which Fanny helped the young woman to select and organise. The woman's heart was not in it, however, so after struggling for months, they sold off as many books as possible, absorbed the remainder into the bookshop and closed the upstairs shop altogether.

In Von Brandis Street, Fanny was visited by one of the Lane brothers, founders of Penguin books, who was impressed at finding two titles by the French linguist, Jacques Maurais, as well as several other titles in the Penguin series on her shelves.

Although for a long time Fanny worked on her own she later engaged a man called Schmidt, a diligent worker but one lacking any knowledge of books and literature and whose English was poor. But he learned quickly and soon he became a reader. After Schmidt went off to work for the CNA, she hired a young Australian girl.

However once war broke out her landlord, the real estate and cinema chain mogul I.W. Schlesinger, began to pressurize her to leave as somebody wished to move into the adjoining shop and take over her space as well. Unable to persuade his lawyer to allow her to remain, she approached a Cabinet Minister, who agreed to invoke legislation protecting tenants from being given notice during the war. Although she continued in the premises for quite a while, she realised that once the war was over and new laws put in place she would be given notice again. She thus began to search for new premises.

Joubert Street, 1952-1966

Opposite them was a dilapidated building that the Johannesburg Building Society was looking to restore. It was very near their old premises and the rental was very reasonable. The new shop in the JBS building had a small ground floor entrance section, but was mostly in the basement. Fanny decided to put the children's books in the ground floor space and to keep the main stock in the basement. They also invested in a neon sign outside the shop to make it more visible from the street.



Vanguard Booksellers – official trade label

Since galleries in Johannesburg were costly, a gallery in the basement where artists could exhibit at a nominal fee was arranged. The first to exhibit was the painter, Douglas Portway, at the time relatively unknown. Their next exhibition was by Eduardo Villa, later to become one of South Africa's premier sculptors. After a while they no longer held exhibitions of original works, but used the space to exhibit their very beautiful books on art and sometimes prints. Says Fanny: "We had simply not managed to make any money, as we could not bring ourselves to charge the artists much".

In August 1952 Fanny's partner, Joe Moed, became a director. Avid readers, they had an immense knowledge of books and became expert in tracing them. Fanny would read all the reviews in the British newspapers: *The Observer*, the *London Sunday Times*, *New Statesman*, *Encounter*, *London Magazine*. Then they would discuss them and order together.

They had a *Bowkers Books-in-Print*, as well as *Whittakers Almanac*, and the whole set of *Transition* (1961-1976), a unique forum from and about the African world and its diaspora, first founded in Uganda.¹⁸ Books were imported from many countries, and both in type and range, they were unmatched. They subscribed to *Film Bulletin*, *Sight and Sound*, *Theatre Monthly*, and *Polemics*, a theatre magazine, and also to architectural publications from Brazil, Bulgarian publications about the film industry, magazines on sex and how to explain sex to children. While in the Joubert Street building, they had a visit from Basil Blackwell from Blackwells, the famous bookshop in Oxford, who told them that they were a "Little Blackwells".

Fanny writes that the shop flourished until the owners of the building were made an offer by American Express, who were very keen because the premises were very near the big hotels, such as the Carlton. The landlords could see that they were obviously more desirable tenants. Fanny and Joe owed R2000 in back rent.

At that time, the CNA were looking to open a bookshop opposite the university and wanted to buy their shop. They offered to employ Fanny at a salary of R600 a month. However, Fanny and Joe could not possibly accept the offer. Their stock was worth R31 000 and they felt that given time to pay off

their back rent, they could easily remain in business.

Commissioner Street, 1966-1974

For months Fanny and Joe scoured the city as far as Braamfontein, looking for new premises with adequate space for their thousands of books. They had accumulated a huge stock and were under-capitalised. Desperate, they settled on a building in Commissioner Street under construction with heaps of sand and rubble outside and still without windows. On the ground floor there was the skeleton of a shop which was to have very large windows. It had numerous additional small rooms where the white and black staff could have tea separately as required by law. It was a good position and not far from their old Joubert Street premises.

With the windows installed, despite the fact that there was no lighting or plumbing, they moved in at the end of December 1966, storing crates of books in the basement. They had to install shelves in a hurry, and sold as much off as possible as they did not have sufficient space. R12 000 was spent on outfitting the store. Sales rose at Christmas but by then they were already in debt. "The move to Commissioner Street was to be the downfall of Vanguard books" Fanny wrote.

It was hoped that the new Carlton Hotel, then nearing completion, would bring an influx of tourists that would improve business. Unfortunately the building was delayed for several years, the street was dead and business was slow. Even when the hotel opened and business improved, the expenses of running a shop on two levels were great. They were forced to employ more staff and found that even highly educated staff did not necessarily know that much about books. Two typists were employed, one to attend to international orders and the other for local, in addition to a bookkeeper and an auditor. Fanny alone managed the subscriptions, a time consuming and onerous task, besides which she was always on call to help the customers, who valued her in-depth knowledge.

Then came a slump. People began to spend less money on books. In addition the shop was plagued by theft of money and of books by staff and customers. Fanny felt that to be a socialist and to be a boss was a contradiction in terms. As she put it, "As an employer I should have taken strict measures to stop the continual frivolity amongst my staff, but as a socialist it was difficult to become a tyrannical employer. I did not really want to be a boss and I think that is why I failed".

The final blow was the increase in the rent

that went up to R1400 a month. Moreover, they were asked to sign a lease for five years, at the end of which their monthly rental would be R3000. This was more than their business could stand. As trade declined they began to fall behind in the rent until they owed R4000. In the past their auditor had issued letters to their customers to help them out and on another occasion they had raised a loan on the cottage that they shared that was almost paid off. But at that time they were not being harassed by their creditors. Their turnover at Christmas had been R31 000 and Fanny felt that they could have continued, had they not been facing a demanding landlord. "The failure of the Vanguard Booksellers rankled in my mind and affected my health" Fanny commented.

After the shop closed down, they were approached by Benny Sachs, brother of Solly, to start a mail order business. They named it the Fanny Klenerman Mail-Order Book Service. They hired a former typist of Vanguard who set about reconstituting a list of all their customers. Sadly, unable to work together with Sachs, they abandoned the business after a short while. The failed mail order business, said Fanny, damaged her reputation.

Conclusion: looking back

In selflessness and dedication, Fanny Klenerman's contribution to the struggle against Apartheid was no less than any of the other political activists who were driven into exile. She was a trade union organiser and founder of the South African Women Workers' trade union, and taught English to blacks in night schools organised by the unions. She ran a bookshop that was unmatched in South Africa. Fanny remembered how it was sometimes impossible to get into their original small shop. Some of the students who had spent many hours in her shop had become world renowned, scientists, architects and writers. She prided herself for having been consulted by such widely-read, intelligent and left inclined academics as historians, Sheridan Johns and Iris Berger. Said Fanny, "People say that no shop has replaced Vanguards – not even Exclusives and others, which are run by staff not informed or widely read. I used to lecture the library staff, and what I would say to them was that no good librarian or person involved with books is able to work without reading widely.

Fanny's one possible regret was not having made place in her life for having children. At the time she had weighed this up against her desire to organise workers - and she had rejected the idea. She explained that this was

not because she did not love children, but because she realised that working consistently as she had done, she would not have had the time to bring up a child and be a mother. So in retrospect, she felt that this was the right decision.

Fanny Klenerman passed away in 1983, within a year of dictating her life story.

NOTES

- 1 Even the dates of Klenerman's birth and death differ in various sources. On the SA Jewish Roots Bank, Cemeteries data base, it is recorded as 1905-1977, while on the data base of the Department of Historical Papers at the William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, it is listed as 1916-1983. As she dictated the story of her life in 1982, a death date of 1977 is not possible. Similarly, a birth date of 1916 or even 1905, does not accord with the fact that in her life story - recorded in 1982 - she gives her age as 85, meaning that she must have been born around 1897.
- 2 In Fanny Klenerman papers, 2103, Department of Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand.
- 3 Email, Rose Zwi to Veronica Belling, 9.2016.
- 4 Sachs, SA History online: towards a people's history, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/emil-sachs>
- 5 Iris Berger, *Threads of Solidarity: Women in South African Industry, 1900-1980*, Indiana University Press, 1993, p92.
- 6 See, Eddie Roux, *Time longer than rope: a history of the black man's struggle in South Africa*. Victor Gollancz, London, 1948.
- 7 South African Workers' Party, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workers_Party_of_South_Africa
- 8 Winifred Holtby, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winifred_Holtby.
- 9 South African History Online: The History of the Labour Unions in South Africa, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/timeline-labour-and-trade-union-movement-south-africa-1920-1939>.
- 10 Max Gordon (contin.) and the S.A. Workers' Party (Klenerman ms).
- 11 Baruch Hirson, "Death of a Revolutionary: Frank Glass/ Li Fu-Jen/John Lang 1901-1988", *The Searchlight South Africa*, vol. 1, no. 1, September 1988, pp36-9.
- 12 Vanguard Press, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanguard_Press
- 13 *New Masses*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_Masses
- 14 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulysses_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulysses_(novel))
- 15 Hirson, 'Death of a Revolutionary', 1988.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 The story of little black Sambo, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Story_of_Little_Black_Sambo.
- 18 *Transition Magazine*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transition_Magazine

MY UNCLE, THE DOCTOR: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HARTWIG BUXBAUM (PART II)

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Stuart Buxbaum



Dr Hartwig Buxbaum

In the early 1930s my late uncle Dr Hartwig Buxbaum left Germany to obtain further medical degrees from Edinburgh and Glasgow so as to be registered with the medical council of South Africa. His brother Gustav, my father, left Germany at the same time, working in Amsterdam for the duration of Hartwig's studies. While in Scotland Hartwig married Johanna Eva Polak

Stuart Buxbaum holds an honours degree in Sociology from the University of the Witwatersrand (1970) and an honours degree in Judaica from UNISA (1984). Employed in the social research unit of the Jewish Board of Deputies in the early 1970s, he subsequently farmed for many years in Mpumalanga.

but the marriage floundered. Meanwhile Rebecca Lessem, who would marry Gustav, had left Memel in Lithuania and was living with her immediate family in Johannesburg. It was now the latter part of the 1930s and Hartwig and Gustav were also in the Union of South Africa. Their close family were left behind in Germany.

During that decade of massively disorientating events in Europe, Hartwig had acquired experience as a medical practitioner, varying from small town German patients, to the sophisticates in Vienna, to Scottish gentry. Now he would be working with rural South Africans. According to the medical register in South Africa, the first evidence of his registration in this country was in 1935, in Zeerust.¹ Imagine this highly cultured Western European doctor, finding himself in a town made famous by Oom Schalk Lourens' creator, Herman Charles Bosman! Roughly eight years before Hartwig's arrival there, Bosman wrote "..... the farmers of the Marico would make their way to Zeerust every three months for *nagmaal*²". Meredith (2007) describes the *nagmaal* as follows: "At the centre [of the town] was Church Square...it was here every three months that far flung farming families and local residents would gather for *nagmaal*, a religious and social event when babies were baptized, marriages were celebrated and the square was cluttered with market stalls, tents and wagons".³

The doctor would have looked on with some interest indeed!

In family reminiscences, Hartwig's stay in Zeerust was never mentioned. It is probable that his stay had been brief. The reminiscences, though sparse, become clearer and more illuminating when Hartwig becomes the doctor in the small rural villages of first Leslie, and then Kinross⁴, on the (then) Eastern Transvaal Highveld.

Out of necessity or through the calling he felt to alleviate illness and suffering, every Friday Hartwig would visit the small trading post of Roodebank, close to the town of Val.⁵ Here the Rosmarin family were the

landlords.⁶ Hartwig was quick to gain the confidences of farmers and laborers alike in this anomalous English-speaking farmers' enclave. It was a little bit of England, almost a dry land version of the Lake Districts. The accents heard were *pukka* English. It was on one of these visits that Hartwig spoke to Kelly King, a direct descendant of the legendary Dick King.⁷ Ever concerned for and protective of his younger brother Gustav, who was clinging to the edges of respectability in what he felt to be an absolutely alien Johannesburg environment, Hartwig proposed, quite outrageously, that he be apprenticed on King's farm as a learner farmer. Gustav was by then a man of thirty. The Kings (Kelly and John) were brothers on separate adjoining farms, and they agreed to this rather madcap idea. And so Gustav shifted gears once more, without grinding the cogs in the slightest, and spent two happy, impecunious years on the farm. He learnt dairying, field cropping and the managing of a piggery with aplomb. A picture of him at this time shows him astride a tall white horse, seemingly quite at ease. Hartwig had thrown his younger brother a lifeline and a chance of a lifetime.



Gustav Buxbaum as apprentice farmer

The Farm Frischgewaagdt, approximately 400 hectares in size, of which five eighths were suitable for crop cultivation, came up for sale around 1938. It was situated equidistant from Leslie and Kinross. Hartwig pushed and cajoled Gustav into making an offer. The sellers looked askance at Gustav, this impecunious, inexperienced putative buyer, and required a guarantor of some standing. It was only Hartwig, by providing a doctor's good name as surety, who could ensure that the sale to the brothers took place. My father settled, alone, in a small farmhouse built in the style of those houses that were so ravaged during the Anglo-Boer War by Kitchener's British forces. The Battle of Bakenlaagte, fought on 30 October 1901,⁸ was but six kilometers away. It was one of many constant

reminders fueling the bitterness towards the British Empire in the hearts of Afrikaners. In this suspicion-laden, Calvinist-dominated rural environment, Gustav put down roots. He withdrew somewhat from the ebullience of his European disposition, becoming more guarded and inward looking. Despite this, he showed his mettle and eagerly acculturated to his new identity as a South African farmer.

The flight from Beverungen

"In the early hours of November 10, 1938 more than a thousand synagogues and many thousands of Jewish shops were destroyed, while thirty thousand Jews were rounded up and sent to concentration camps".⁹ On map 14 of Martin Gilbert's extraordinarily researched account of *Kristallnacht*, the small town of Beverungen appears in the top most corner. Seligmann, a well-respected upright citizen of the town, was able before his short imprisonment to rescue the *Mezuzah* and two *Yads* (pointers, usually silver, in the form of a hand used to follow the public reading of the Torah) from the ruins of the synagogue. Among those arrested that morning was Hermann Mannsbach. His widow, Martha Mannsbach, who survived Theresienstadt, described the anguish of the imprisonment, the desperateness of the wives and families of those imprisoned.¹⁰

Beverungen lay midway between two diametrically opposed fates: the harbour city of Bremen lay almost 225 kilometers to the west and the concentration camp of Buchenwald 243 kilometers to the east. Once again the surety of Hartwig came into play, ensuring that Seligmann, his wife, Bertha, and mother-in-law, Karolina Nussbaum, would leave for South Africa, albeit separately, from Bremen on 11 February 1939.

Hartwig's foresight in providing the necessary documents and exit permits for his parents and grandmother saved their lives.¹¹ To suggest otherwise, is not borne out by the fate of Beverungen's Jewish community. For those Jews still in the town and in various parts of Germany at the time of the Reich's violent reaction to Herschel Greenspan's act of revenge, the trigger for *Kristallnacht*, the chances of survival were slim indeed. A source documenting the fate of Beverungen's Jewry shows the tragedy of it all. Of the recorded 73 Jews who had not, by 1938, emigrated from the town, fully 54 faced death in the camps and ghettos of Europe. Of these, only three survived.¹²

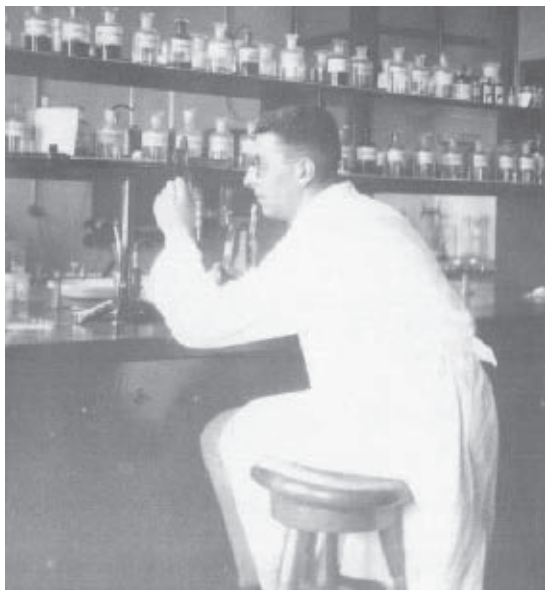
Seligmann and Bertha, because of legislative obstructions, could not directly journey to South Africa, but followed the circuitous route via Lourenco Marques and Swaziland¹³. It appears that Karolina arrived

directly in Durban, on the *SS Pretoria*. The Lloyd's Register (1937-1938) describes the ship as being part of the *Deutsche Ost-Afrika-Linie* fleet. The journey for her would have been especially distressing. She was eighty-two years old, bewildered, fearful and alone, entering a strange country. The Aliens Registration Card of Bertha Buxbaum states that she arrived in the Union from Swaziland via Bethal on 23 May 1939. Karolina Nussbaum's card records her arrival as being on 13 March of that year.

And so they journeyed on, to the farm on the Highveld, to Hartwig and Gustav.

The Doctor

The role and practice of a rural doctor in South Africa in the 1930s is a fascinating one. Again, Hartwig's sophisticated European experience would, with a smile and a shrug, have been disavowed. He found himself now confronted by rural black patients, Afrikaner farmers (many of whom were suspicious of the - at that time - modern medical treatments which would supplant their strikingly and immense tome of '*boereraat*')¹⁴ and a sprinkling of Jewish traders, millers, hoteliers, and farmers. He would have had a unique kinship and fellowship with them all because of the uniformly respectful characteristics that constituted his make-up. He had the trust, humour, patience, dedication and above all, humaneness and sensitivity to attend to his patients in this truly extraordinary environment.



Hartwig Buxbaum, the Doctor

My late mother frequently related, with a touch of disbelief, a tale about "*der Hartwig*". On the Leslie-Ogies road, a strip of fertile farming soil which would, forty years later,

be chronicled by Geoff Sifrin,¹⁵ there lived a Jewish farmer and his newlywed wife. The lady was expecting her first child and had been a patient of Hartwig's throughout her pregnancy. Having received an urgent call, Hartwig arrived at the farm in the early Highveld evening. Reluctant, probably, to face a world wracked by confusion and turmoil, the soon-to-be-born baby girl delayed her appearance. Nonplussed, the doctor sat on the edge of the bed with his patient, an inveterate gamer, and played cards with her until dawn saw the arrival of the infant. "*Shtetl zikh dos for*", my mother would say, "*di beyde hobn geshpilt in korten a ganse nakht!*"¹⁶

My late father enjoyed telling the (somewhat apocryphal) story of an Afrikaans farmer arriving at Hartwig's surgery in Kinross. The rural doctor would be called upon to treat all manner of ailments, and this incident was no exception. Suffering from an incessant toothache, the farmer asked the doctor what it would cost to have the offending tooth removed. Two shillings and sixpence, Doctor Buxbaum replied. "And for the whole lot?" asked the farmer. Twelve shillings and sixpence came the reply. The farmer felt this was a reasonable deal, and that present pain would be a fair trade off to ensure a lifetime of toothless freedom from discomfort. The doctor obliged.¹⁷

My uncle had an interesting family among his patients. This was the Mbonani family, who lived on the Booysen's farm, Schaapkraal.¹⁸ The patriarch, Willem Mbonani, lorded it over his brood of at least, as I recall, three sons and a daughter. Brought up in the Ndebele traditions of their father, the brood displayed the lighter skin and facial characteristics of their mother, a 'Coloured' woman. The family was technically and entrepreneurially gifted, despite the grave restrictions that people of colour were subjected to, especially as farm workers. Hartwig, by equal dint of kindness and persuasion, ensured that they moved to Gustav's fledgling farming enterprise on Frischgewaagd, where they were to live, toil and instruct Gustav in the enterprise until he found his feet.

That my mother was in awe of Hartwig remained obvious throughout her life. She had arrived in South Africa, as previously described, a young woman steeped in the culture of German-speaking Memel on the Baltic Sea. Johannesburg was a lonely, discomfiting city, and the family lived on the edge of poverty. She yearned for the finery of their abandoned home in Memel, the music conservatoire that she loved, the forest that edged this island of old *Mitteleuropa* and wished desperately to return. Alas, it was by now a city that Hitler had entered

via that same Baltic Sea, aboard an armed cruiser in 1939, soon after his invasion of Czechoslovakia.¹⁹

In Johannesburg, in an almost closed circle of expatriate *Yekkes*²⁰ removed from the dominant *Litvaks* in the city, she met Gustav. They would marry in March 1942. If Johannesburg was an alienating city, a brash and harsh environment, made even Kafkaesque by its racially differentiated structure, how daunting the prospect must have been of living on a Highveld farm, in a ramshackle home which she would share with her parents-in-law. Uncertainly, nervously, she began her walk down the aisle of the Berea synagogue that autumn day. Hartwig watched the procession, standing in the front row. She turned to him mid-step, and he returned her glance with a grand smile and a broad wink. It was a gesture she would never forget. It gave her the courage to continue her walk with her usual confident, elegant step, secure in the knowledge that she would always have an ally, a confidant. She would always like the sound of being the sister-in-law to Dr. Hartwig Buxbaum.



Rebecca Buxbaum, born Lessem

By this time, while he was the doctor in Kinross, a woman, Hedwig Hoernschemeyer, had appeared at Hartwig's side. Born in 1907 in Wallenhorst, Germany, she was, it would always, almost subversively, be mentioned, a nurse who had previously worked with him at a hospital in Germany. She was German. She was a gentile woman. He was still married to Johanna Eva. Hartwig was torn by her arrival. He was the doctor in a small, rural town where conservatism was the watchword. But even more difficult was the discomfort he and Hedwig felt within his small, immediate family. For his religiously observant parents, just recently arrived from the impending horror in Europe, Hedwig's

presence would have been met with disbelief. She would have felt scorned; she would have felt stifled at the "small town-ness" of her situation, of the bleak Highveld landscape. The couple would later move to Durban.

Hedwig's arrival forced Hartwig to resolve the impasse between him and Johanna Eva. In November 1938, in that awful, destructive month of *Kristallnacht*, he had finally begun to institute divorce proceedings against her, having come to realize that hopes of reconciliation were dim. She had, in the middle of 1938, left Edinburgh (where she had lived the previous five years) for St. Angél in Mexico City, to be with her mother and step-father. The divorce proceedings dragged on, endlessly delayed by the continental separation that made a court appearance in South Africa by Johanna, as demanded by the courts, well-nigh impossible. The divorce appears to have been eventually finalized only in September of 1941.²¹

It was with relief and delight that Rebecca Lessem was welcomed into the Buxbaum family by her parents-in-law, Seligmann and Bertha. They liked Gustav's choice. Rebecca was courteous, stylish, educated, respectful and cultured. But when roused, she could display a cutting anger. She referred to her own parents as *Papa* and *Mama*, and to Gustav and Hartwig's as *Vatter* and *Mutter*. She confronted the bleak Highveld landscape by embracing it, delighting in the farm's small tree-lined plantations. She saw cosmos flowers for the first time when they returned from honeymoon in Durban, where they had spent time with Hartwig. When she saw them, from the rough gravel road leading to the farm, she persuaded Gustav to gear down the big Dodge and ran out of the car, gathering arms-full of flowers and placing them in her lap. Gustav laughingly chided her. They were a pest he said, uncontrollable weeds in a maize field. That much he knew, after a few seasons on the farm.

Back in the small house on the farm with its outside latrine, Bertha would not forgo the habits of her previous life in Beverungen. She would rise early and prepare for the family breakfast, retire, rest, and then, in changed clothing, prepare for the family lunch, retire, rest and, again in changed clothing, present herself for the evening meal. Initially Rebecca, the worldly Memel-raised woman, surely felt uneasy in this household, especially when her mother-in-law one day very ceremoniously handed her the bunch of keys to the kitchen and linen cupboard, bare as they were, saying, "*Togter*, these are yours now. You run the household."

So, despite the family fissures, by the middle of 1942 the Buxbaum family seemed to have reconstituted itself in safety after

their degrading experiences in Europe and Germany of the 1930s.

In the midst of World War II, with South African forces “up North”, Seligmann, Bertha, Gustav and Rebecca were safe on the farm. Hartwig had married Hedwig and they lived in Durban, and Sidonie, Hartwig and Gustav’s sister, was living in Ipolysag in Hungary, having borne a young son Denés. She was married to the stately Rabbi Phillip Singer, rabbi of that small town.



Sidonie and Rabbi Phillip Singer

For the German Jews in South Africa, petty restrictions abounded, and these served to heighten the unease that the Buxbaum family felt in their safe yet exilic condition. Seligmann’s registration certificate # 32522, issued under the Aliens Registration Act of 1937, saw him having to report to the police each time he departed from, or arrived in the broader municipal district. Two pages of his ‘book’ are particularly wrenching. After spending some time in Durban with Hartwig, he reported back to the Leslie police on 10 August of 1942. And on 18 November of 1942, he reported again to, in the broader scheme of things, a minor functionary at that same police station. The inscription by Sergeant JJ van Vuuren reads: “To 18 Alice Brown Road Durban, to visit sick son.”

Hartwig in Durban

It was at this Durban address that Hartwig and Hedwig had settled. Hartwig’s profession proved portable. He carried his medical expertise with him. And besides his

specialized medical knowledge, he had that other priceless commodity that Joseph Conrad, in his novel *Lord Jim* (p11), described as “ability in the abstract”. Bearing in mind city council regulations, he could set up practice almost wherever he wished. His wife was his nursing sister. He was open for business.

Sociologists and demographers have speculated about Jews and their choice of occupation.²² Professions such as medicine, accountancy, architecture and dentistry allowed practitioners the luxury of self-employment. It lessened dependence on the vagaries of the corporate world, and ensured a protective cocoon, insulated from anti-Jewish feelings in the work place. Hartwig’s portability and “ability in the abstract” proved great assets.

Durban provided, in contrast to his previous rural consulting rooms, a cosmopolitan and exotic mix of patients. The Jewish population of the city, according to the 1936 census, stood at 2849, forming 3.1% of the white population of the city.²³ It seems that the community was concentrated around the central city and the Berea. From his time in Scotland, Hartwig would have felt quite comfortable in mainly English-speaking Durban. He had, however, not previously encountered a large Black urban proletariat, but a generation or two removed from its rural, tribal life. He had probably also had very limited contact with a Hindu patient base. On the Transvaal Highveld, his contact with the Indian population was limited essentially to those of the Moslem persuasion, mainly traders by occupation. Durban was an exciting city for him. His tolerance and open mindedness, and his dedication to upholding the medical ethics of treating his middle class patients as well as the needy and the indigent, was his constant preoccupation. It would be his severest test.

The family narrative frequently repeated the unfolding of these events in Hartwig’s life, and these have been collaborated in the report of the history of the alumni of the König-Wilhelm-Gymnasium.²⁴ One of Hartwig’s patients was a middle-aged Indian man, who was suffering from typhoid fever. Hartwig nursed him as best he could. An ambulance was summoned. The narrative records that due to the war emergency measures in place at the time, ambulances were in short supply, and slow to arrive. Desperate to save the man’s life, Hartwig for once succumbed to an uncharacteristic act of impatience. Gingerly he edged back the elegant Packard that he was so fond of, helped his patient into it and then gunned the motor, racing through the gears to the hospital.

The narrative unfolds, like a play, towards its tragic ending. Hartwig fell desperately ill, having contracted typhoid fever from his patient. The news of his illness reached his parents, brother and sister-in-law on the Highveld farm. Seligmann, as recorded in the police records regulating the travel of German expatriates, hastened to Durban. Meanwhile, Hartwig's patient strengthened and recovered from his illness. But Hartwig's illness increased in its severity. He died, aged only 37, on 27 November 1942.²⁵

The family sped to Durban for Hartwig's funeral. Outside of the town of Springs, by an unhappy coincidence of driver fatigue, anxiety and misty, rainy conditions, they were involved in a terrible accident in which Bertha was fatally injured. My mother Rebecca was expecting her first child, a girl. When she was born, on 9 July 1943, she was named Beatrice, after Bertha Buxbaum, who had mourned the passing of her eldest son, Hartwig, for but a few days.

After Hartwig's death, Hedwig married Lothar Bromberger, an émigré from Hamburg. The couple settled in Cape Town, where Hedwig passed away in 1965.²⁶

The Singer family in Hungary

Oh Sidonie! Married only a few years and living in faraway Ipolysag, how did she hear the news

of her elder brother's death, and her mother's tragic end? Her husband Rabbi Philip Singer had a large and extended family in the town. But could they have quieted Sidonie in her loss, in her loneliness, in her longing? Could her small son, Denés, have given her comfort?

All of this while, Seligmann had been fretting anxiously about the safety of his daughter and son-in-law in Ipolysag. On 3 November 1939, from his new home on the Highveld farm, he sat down to write an urgent letter, a desperate plea, for his family. It was addressed to the British Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council for German, Austrian, and Czechoslovakian Jewry. Looking at the reply dated a day after the new year of 1940, in the cold light of history, the letter is striking in its almost nonchalant, bureaucratic tone. In its entirety, it reads "Dear Mr Buxbaum, Your letter of the 3rd November addressed to the Chief Rabbi has been passed on to us. In reply to it we regret to have to inform you that we are unable to assist your son-in-law Rabbi Fueleop [sic] Singer to come to this country. Owing to the war the British Government does not grant any facilities to immigrate to this country for the time being".

There is extant a brief exchange between

father and daughter sent via the intermediary office of the Red Cross of Hungary. Sidonie writes on 24 September 1941,²⁷ "We are all well and hope the same about you. Denés is already a great boy. Sidy". Seligmann replies on 13 January 1942, "*Auch wir sind alle gesund. Hatty und Hede waren Weihnachten hier. ²⁸Gustav hat sich verlobt. Wir gruessen euch drei. Eltern*".²⁹

Meanwhile, Hungary had extended its borders at the time of the Second World War, and the number of officially registered Jews in those areas was, in mid-1941, more than 803 000³⁰. While more moderate than his predecessor, Miklos Kallay, under pressure from Germany, began a program of restricting the economic activity of Jews in the system, eliminating them from public and cultural life, and curtailing their civic rights. These measures, however, were too mild for Germany's liking and tension was heightened between Berlin and Budapest.³¹ In March 1944, "Operation Margaret" commenced. The Germans occupied Hungary. Eichmann arrived in Budapest in that very month. The internment and rounding up of Hungarian Jewry began in earnest. That month, Jews were ordered to wear the Yellow Badge. This was followed ghettoization and finally the round-ups and deportations, mainly to Auschwitz. By the end of it all, some 565 000 had perished.³²

On 7 May 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. A postcard



Sidonie Singer (nee Buxbaum)

bearing a half-sized war-time stamp and dated 15 May, 1945, was received by Seligmann from the Apostolic Delegation in Bloemfontein, South Africa. It reads: "Dear Sir, I have received your letter of the 27th April, and have to inform you that we are forwarding an inquiry to the Vatican by air mail regarding your daughter, son-in-law and family in Ipolysag, Hungary. If and when any reply comes, we shall let you know".

Of the Jewish community that had previously lived peacefully in the town of Ipolysag and its vicinity, 554 men, women and children were exterminated, mainly in the Ipolysag Ghetto and in Auschwitz.³³ Among them were Sidonie Singer (nee Buxbaum) and her young son, Denés.³⁴

Sidonie's husband, Rabbi Phillip Singer, survived Auschwitz. In Jerusalem, where he found refuge and safety, he waited desperately for his wife and child, hoping that they too had survived the atrocity, and that they would somehow find their way to Israel. He finally remarried a widow with two sons, all of whom were Holocaust survivors. He retained his deep religious faith until his peaceful death, circa 1989.

And Johanna Eva?

The divorce document gives a clue to Johanna Eva's life after separating from Hartwig. She had left Scotland in the middle of 1938 for Mexico City where she had family and lived at Alta Vista 36, St Angél. In 1947, then aged 35 years, she married Hans (De) Neumann, a man two years her senior.³⁵ An engineer, Neumann had been born in Graz, Austria and had also studied art in Dresden. Having lived in Prague in 1938, he was sent thence to Theresienstadt. After the war, he made his way to Mexico. Johanna Eva died on 15 June, 1982, of a cardio respiratory illness, aged seventy.³⁶

My mother's oft repeated remark comes to mind: "She was an heiress, you know". How true was this? The suburb in which Johanna Eva lived when she joined her family in Mexico City gives a clue. The area has been described as follows: "The architectonic value of this zone is incalculable... [there are] spaces that represent various architectural styles such as baroque, neoclassical and neo colonial.... In this neighborhood, you can find various *casonas*: bold, old majestic houses that usually belonged to someone important..."³⁷

A Tombstone, a Memorial and a Eulogy

First, a tombstone. On returning from a visit to Klaipeda (previously Memel) in Lithuania, our younger daughter, Galia,

became increasingly intrigued with the family's past. At her urging, the lonely, unmarked grave of the late Karolina Nussbaum was traced in the Johannesburg Jewish Cemetery of Brixton. She had died in March 1941, two years after her arrival in South Africa, aged 88 years. The rush of tragic events at that time, of trauma and admitted neglect had left the grave unmarked, without a tombstone. In September of 2010, this historical oversight was righted when, in the presence of a *minyan* (prayer quorum), a new headstone was unveiled. A plaque on the grave recalls the life of Sidonie Singer and her young son Denés.



Karolina Nussbaum and her granddaughter Sidonie

Next, a memorial. In modern Beverungen a rough-hewn rock marks the site of that landmark of Beverungen's Jewish community, the synagogue. Recently erected by the Town's municipality, the plaque on the rock bears the following inscription:³⁸ "HAUS LANGE STRASSE 23HIER STAND SEIT 1852DIE AM 10 NOVEMBER 1938 GEPLÜNDERTE UND GESCHÄNDETE SYNAGOGUE DER ISRAELITISCHEN GEMEINDE BEVERUNGEN".³⁹

Finally, a eulogy. I remember well the day that first I met Rasool Malek of Kinross, who had been under house arrest for the ten years between 1963-1973, for his opposition to Apartheid. Among his close associates were Michael Harmel, Dr Yusuf Dadoo and Joe Slovo.⁴⁰ I walked the high steps into the Maleks' store with its wide, hospitable verandah. The shop was typical of those multi-range merchandise stores so characteristic of rural South African *dorps*

of decades ago. Clothing, haberdashery, tools, building material, canned foods all packed, brimful on wooden shelves, reached the very ceiling. I was sure that Joseph Conrad's eponymous hero Lord Jim, that merchant's agent in the Asian and Pacific seaports would have been happy to provision ships from just such an establishment.

I was uncomfortable that first day I met Mr Malek. I was a young South African farmer who had tasted nothing but freedom my entire life. Awkwardly, I engaged this intellectual poet in some mundane discussion. I remember purposely inserting the word 'amulet' into this casual conversation. His face creased into a smile, his eyes flashed in recognition of this intriguing word. I asked if he recalled my late uncle, Doctor Hartwig Buxbaum. "He lived here in the Stein's house, right next door to your shop," I said. He nodded vigorously. "Yes, I remember him well. He was a socialist".

More than all the snippets of whispered praise that I had heard down the many years about my late uncle, the Doctor Hartwig Buxbaum, this, I thought, was his finest eulogy.

Postscript

In November 2013, our elder daughter, Lara,⁴¹ received the signal honour of being awarded the Thomas Pringle prize from the English Academy in South Africa, becoming the youngest recipient of this prestigious award in its fifty-two year history. She was, at the time, completing her PhD in English Literature at Witwatersrand University.

Lara's acceptance speech was, in her inimical style, astute, witty, incisive and self-deprecatory.

Her exhilarating concluding remark fused memory with the present, artfully aligning seemingly disparate disciplines in an emotionally charged tribute:

"I will be the second doctor in my family, but unlike the first, my great-uncle Hartwig Buxbaum, who could actually save lives, I'll continue to bumble along, convinced that literature saves lives".⁴²

NOTES

- 1 SA Medical Journal, August 10, 1935, p542.
- 2 Delmar, Peter, *The Platinum Road: The road to Botswana*, 2013, p201.
- 3 Meredith, Martin, *Diamonds, Gold and War*, 2007, p70.
- 4 The villages of Leslie and Kinross are approximately 16 kms apart, on the (now) Mpumalanga Highveld, lying east of Springs and west of Bethal.
- 5 Val is a village on the Highveld close to Greylingstad, on the road to Standerton. "An inn was established there that would serve the stage coach route from the Goldfields of

- the Lowveld, to Johannesburg" (<http://valhotel.co.za>).
- 6 "On this farm was our trading store, post office, garage and maize mill. This small trading centre, Roodebank, was a convenient focus for the cultural and political activities of the area. So it was from the stoep of our trading store that politicians of the calibre of General Smuts, General J.B.M. Hertzog, Tielman Roos, Oswald Pirow, Denys Reitz, Jan Hofmeyr, General J.G. Kemp and many others delivered their speeches", Rosmarin, Ike. *Inside Story*. W.J. Flesch and Partners (Pty) Ltd 1991, p1.
- 7 "A statue which is located on the Esplanade at Aliwal Street (Durban) commemorates the ride by Dick King to Grahamstown in 1842 to obtain help for the besieged British Garrison" (www.heritagekzn.co.za).
- 8 Where the Boer forces under General Louis Botha defeated Lt. Col GE Benson's column.
- 9 Gilbert, Martin, *Kristallnacht: Prelude to Destruction*, 2006, pp 44-52.
- 10 Martha Mannsbach (nee Davids) of Beverungen, lost both her father and husband in Theresienstadt. She found safety after the war in the then Rhodesia's copper belt, in the town of Mufulira. She and her brother, Walter Davids, relocated to Cape Town in 1963.
- 11 Robins, S, *Letters of Stone*, 2016, p171. In this extraordinary book, Robins documents the desperate hopes and attempts of his grandparents, stranded in Nazi Berlin in the years prior to the transports to Auschwitz, to leave Germany. Robins's father, having himself escaped Germany for the safety of Port Elizabeth, is asked, in his quest to facilitate his parents' migration to this country, "to give an undertaking to assist... in the support of your parents thereby prevent(ing) them from becoming a burden on the Union government". Hartwig would have received a similar instruction.
- 12 Calculation done from a document found on Google, "*Namensliste Beverungen*".
- 13 For more on Jews escaping Europe and arriving in Lourenco Marques, see Sichel, Frieda H, *From Refugee to Citizen*, AA Balkema, Cape Town, 1966, pp 98-9.
- 14 Frack, Isadore, *A South African Doctor looks backwards and forward*, 1943. Frack (p118) offers an illuminating description of such *boereraat* (home remedies). "*Borsdruppels*, pain elixirs, *duiwelsdrek*, *levensessens*, *senuwee spisifik*..." (p118): "Many a time, when I offered to prescribe for him, I was always met with the same reply: "*Ons het ons eie medisyne*" (We have our own medicine.)
- 15 Sifrin, Geoff, 'Thirty Miles of Yiddishe Farmers' in *To Gershn. Tales of P.eople of Zjembin*, 1995.
- 16 Yiddish: "Imagine! The two played cards for that entire night!"
- 17 For corroborative evidence, see Frack (p21): "There is a great deal of dental decay in the country districts. There is a type of patient who seems to take a delight in having a couple of teeth extracted whenever he has the opportunity".
- 18 Schaapkraal lies adjacent to the farm Bakenlaagte, scene of the previously mentioned Anglo-Boer War battle.
- 19 A video clip. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFsfP_5AcQ4) graphically shows the event in extraordinarily dramatic detail, infused with horror.
- 20 *Yekkes*, a (sometimes unflattering) term for German Jews and referring to the short jacket typically worn by them, in contrast to the longer clothing worn by religious East

- European Jews (*Litvaks*).
- 21 My grateful thanks to the archivist Dennis Potgieter, who so cooperatively and diligently traced the divorce document of Hartwig and Johanna Eva Buxbaum Ref: vol. 5/545 01 301, 1941
- 22 Dubb, A, and Della Pergola, S, *Advance Report No. 9 South African Jewish Population Study*, 1978.
- 23 *Ibid*, Table 2, p4.
- 24 Ostkamper, *Network for Westphalian Emigration to America since the 19th Century* (2003 – 2014), p6.
- 25 Hartwig is buried in the Stellawood Jewish Cemetery in Durban.
- 26 Ostkamper, p6.
- 27 Robins (p207) tellingly describes how correspondence was regulated: “The war also made it almost impossible to send letters to countries that were at war with Germany... Letters were replaced by twenty-five-word telegrams sent through the International Red Cross Committee.”
- 28 My grateful thanks are expressed to Hedwig Riegler, of Vienna, Austria, for her appreciative reading of the text and the many useful corrections to the German spelling and expressions used in the story.
- 29 “We too are all well. Hatty and Hede were here for Christmas. Gustav has become engaged. We greet the three of you. Parents.”
- 30 Kasnett, *The World that was: Hungary/Romania*, 1999, p32.
- 31 *Ibid*, p33.
- 32 *Ibid*, p34.
- 33 www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/sahy108.htm. The list of the destroyed Jewish community of Ipolysag (now known as Sahy) was translated by Yocheved Klausner.
- 34 *Ibid*, p11.
- 35 <https://books.google.co.za> Eva Polak Neumann
- 36 My thanks to Dr Rose Lerer Cohen, genealogist, resident in Jerusalem, for tracing the immigration of Johanna Eva to San Angél, Mexico. This finding led to more information of the latter days of Johanna’s life in Mexico.
- 37 SanAngél, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San>
- 38 Buxbaum Seligman, op.cit. p. 75. The postscript was written by the present author., who presented this history to the Eleventh International Congress of Jewish Studies, in Jerusalem in 1993, on behalf of his late grandfather. I wish to acknowledge, again, Mrs Gerda Jackson, who thirty-three years ago, translated my late grandfather’s history of the Jewish community of Beverungen into English.
- 39 “The house on 23 Lange Street. Here, since 1852, stood the synagogue of the Jewish community of Beverungen, which was plundered and desecrated on the 10th November, 1938”.
- 40 Information obtained from Ahmed Malek, son of the late Mr Rasool Malek.
- 41 I would like to thank my wife, Denise and my daughters, Lara and Galia, for their assistance, patience and encouragement.
- 42 *South African Jewish Report*, 8-13 November, 2013.

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“TRADITION IS THE ILLUSION OF PERMANENCE”¹ - A FRESH LOOK AT SOME PURIM, PESACH AND OTHER JEWISH FESTIVAL TRADITIONS

*

Gwynne Schrire

“Tradition!” sings Tevya in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, “You may ask, ‘How did this tradition get started?’ I’ll tell you! - I don’t know. But it’s a tradition.”

Tradition (from the Latin *traditio* - to transmit, hand over or give for safekeeping and referring to legal transfers and inheritance) is a way of thinking or behaving that has been used by a particular group for a long time.² It is transmitted by being taught by one generation to the next. Presumed to be ancient, unalterable and deeply important, traditions can be less ‘natural’ than one thinks. They persist - and evolve - for thousands of years because of an inherent conservatism, a dislike of change that ensures their perpetuation.

Such is the force of tradition that excavations by Yigael Yadin revealed that Bar Kochba’s followers (c.132 CE) wore stripes similar to those found in *taleisim* today.³ As Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe said, “When a tradition gathers enough strength to go on for centuries, you don’t just turn it off one day.”⁴

The modern meaning of tradition came when Enlightenment thinkers, examining the concept of progress, contrasted modernity with tradition. One may think all traditions have an ancient history but some have been invented deliberately for political or cultural reasons.⁵ Think about Yom Hashoah or Yom Ha’atzmaut.

Judaism is filled with traditions. Thought unchangeable, these have been adapted to suit the requirements or influences of the environment in which Jews are living, particularly when there are enough influential people who see the need for change. As traditions usually change gradually we are often unaware of the change, and may think there were none.⁶

If one looks at marriage traditions, for example, one can see that we do things

differently in the 20th Century. The *Shulchan Aruch* of Rabbi Joseph Karo (1488-1575) laid down that it was mandatory for a man to marry his niece or, if unavailable, his cousin.⁷ Polygamy was practised until Jews moved into monogamous Christian Europe and Rabbi Gershom ben Judah⁸ banned it unless permission to take a second wife was obtained from 100 rabbis in three countries! The Chatam Sofer (1782-1839)⁹ decreed that weddings had to be performed outdoors. Many old prints illustrate this - Warsaw winter weddings must have been grim.

Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ben Zion Uziel (1880-1953) ruled that the only women allowed in the synagogue were the bridegroom’s mother - and - of course - the bride. Why? Because he held that kissing in shul, even of small children, was prohibited and that was the only way to prevent degrading kissing from occurring under a *chupah*, where not only the bride and groom kissed but even relatives and friends, men and women. Said he, “I constantly warned in the Diaspora for them not to kiss and on occasion they listened to me, but numerous times they did not listen and I was aggrieved due to this.”

This article will show how some of our other traditions have altered alongside circumstances and environments.

There is the story of the young wife bringing the roast chicken to the Seder table, with one half placed on top of the other.

“Why do you cut your chicken like that?” her new mother-in-law asked.

“That is Pesach tradition, isn’t that so, Ma?” said the young wife.

“Yes” her mother responded. “Isn’t that so Mama?” turning to her own mother.

“I don’t know about tradition” replied the bobba, “In the shtetl, my Pesach pan wasn’t big enough for a whole chicken”.

There is a difference between traditions and immutable laws. Nowhere in *Tanach* does it require separate meat and milk crockery and cutlery, nowhere does it forbid mixed choirs, nowhere does it require women to wear wigs. Those traditions are derived from commentaries and decisions made many years after the Biblical era and many years before the present time. When Jews

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moved into different countries, they adapted traditions to the different life styles and cultures. Something adopted by Jews from their neighbours in one generation can become almost sacred to a later generation, as can be seen in Jerusalem, where *Hasids* walk around summer streets dressed like 16th Century Polish noblemen.

Shabbat traditions include lighting candles and eating challah. The children of Israel used neither candles nor electricity for light; they used clay olive oil lamps. They did not light anything before Shabbat. It was Rabbi Saadia Gaon in Babylon who decided that Jews should say a blessing over a Shabbat light. He felt threatened by competition from the Karaites, who would not light anything on or just before Shabbat, comparing this to pagan worship. We are not in Babylon any more, we don't worry about the Karaites any more, we don't worry about why we started doing it, we have been benching *light* for a thousand years – we do it!! *It's a tradition*.

As for candles, they only became affordable from the 16th Century, replacing rushes, and cheap in the 19th Century when its manufacture was mechanised and paraffin wax replaced tallow (cow or sheep fat). Old-fashioned olive oil lamps used in Biblical Israel were replaced by new-fangled candles (old-fashioned candles are unlikely to be replaced by new-fangled electricity because they have come to symbolise Shabbat). Nor did Jews in Biblical Israel eat braided challah on Shabbat. Challah was adopted by Jews in 15th century Germany, where plaited bread was a Friday tradition honouring the Teutonic goddess Freya, wife of Wednesday's Woden.¹⁰

A Purim tradition during the Megillah reading is to make noises to drown out Haman's name. Not so in Amsterdam where, in 1640, the leaders of the Portuguese-Jewish community thought the custom more appropriate to barbarians than to civilized individuals and banned it. Encountering resistance, the prohibition was repeated three decades later with the fine increased twenty-fold.¹¹

A similar ban in March 1783 at London's Bevis Marks Synagogue led to the "Purim riots", started by 14 members who refused to obey the "cold decree" of the Mahamad.¹² The shul leadership informed the city marshal and constables evicted the noise makers.

James Picciotto (1875) described the event:

It was once the custom among the Jews, during the feast of Purim, for unruly boys and silly men to show their reprobation of Haman's conduct by loudly knocking against the Synagogue benches during the celebration of the service. This absurd and

irreverent usage had ever been opposed by the congregational authorities; and, immediately before Purim they issued strict orders forbidding such puerile manifestations. Nevertheless certain members of the congregation, either from mere spirit of mischief or from love of opposition, insisted on Purim eve on following a custom more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Whereupon on the morrow the ruling powers secured the attendance of a couple of constables who, on the attempted repetition of such discreditable behaviour, very quickly removed the offenders. The Mahamad summoned before them the delinquents, who all, with a solitary exception, either appeared or sent complete apologies. A few of the parties were condemned to pay slight fines for their disobedience, others were altogether forgiven, and thus the matter ended so far as the public was concerned, albeit the Purim riots formed for some time a favourite topic of conversation with communal gossips.¹³

One of those arrested was Moses Montefiore's 21-year old nephew Joseph. He claimed he had not heard the proclamation banning "Haman knocking" and offered profuse apologies.¹⁴

The "solitary exception" was Isaac Mendes Furtado, a scrivener and notary. He was so outraged by the entrance of constables in the synagogue during the service that he refused to appear before the Mahamad, and sent the following "offensive and scurrilous"¹⁵ missive:

Gentn, The insult and affront put on me and others at the Synagogue last Monday night by introducing the Constables disturbing me in my Devotions and in the distribution of my Charities to the poor, is very insolent. This Act of Violence, committed in breach of the Peace and to obstruct a Religious Ceremony, for some thousands of years established, put the congregation into confusion ... as you have given sanction to this unwarrantable Act, and you having in council come to a resolution to countenance and supported [sic], grants me no hopes of Satisfaction. The addition to the number of Constables on the next morning was merely premeditated to act with greater violence, and I were one of the two persons marked out by some of the Vestry to be charged in custody if convicted at Knocking of Haman. Tis a fortunate circumstance that I did not attend that morning, for some fatal Consequence would certainly have ensued these considerations. I do therefore abhor and detest your measures and resolutions,

and despise you as a body, and hold your power in great contempt. For what man can return safe to his home from the Congregation? I do renounce your Judaism ... and inheritance of your Land to come ,, and ... dismember myself from so irreligious a society ... A petit constable may take your president and your whole council in custody before a common magistrate.”¹⁶

The wealthy Furtado expressed “his firm determination not to hold any further intercourse with members of the community”, baptised his children and built some tenements in Mile End named “Purim Place”.

Furtado was not the only one to leave the fold because of the inflexibility of the Bevis Marks committee. Isaac D’Israeli and his father were members. In 1813 the shul elected Isaac warden. He refused the honour, miffed that he was given it so late in his life. The shul fined him £40 for turning it down as was its tradition. Isaac refused to pay and an angry correspondence continued until 1817, when, with Benjamin’s bar mitzvah coming up and a teacher employed, Isaac sent a letter saying “I am under the painful necessity of wishing that my name be erased from the list of your members of Yehedim.”

He then baptised his children - but not himself. Benjamin gave no speech at his barmitzvah but delivered many as British Prime Minister.¹⁷ (Observing British tradition the first synagogue in Cape Town, Tikvath Israel, in 1849 drew up laws fining members who refused to take office - but without such consequences.¹⁸

Passover is tradition-rich – some very old, some not so very old. The Haggadah text is based on a prayer book edited by Rabbi Amram ben Sheshnah from Sura, Babylon (856 - 876 CE.). *Dayenu* came into the Haggadah with Rashi (1040 - 1105), *Chad Gadya* with *Sefer Rokeach* (1160-1238) and *Ki Lo Naeh, Ki Lo Yaeh* was first cited by Rabbi Yaakov bar Yehuda of London (c.1285 CE).¹⁹

According to Israel Abrahams in *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*, ritual had not gained that mastery over Jewish life which it enjoyed after the 15th Century. He quotes a story of Maharil spending Passover at his father-in-law when his daughter asked her father why he had raised the dish, and the father immediately proceeded with the recital “We were servants of Pharaoh in Egypt”. Thus her question replaced the Four Questions.²⁰

A few decades ago there was a tradition of leaving an empty chair for the Russian refuseniks living under a modern pharaoh who would not let his people go. That was abandoned when the gates were opened.

Today a new tradition is developing of filling a cup of water just before the second cup of wine to honour the role of Miriam the Prophetess and highlight the contributions of Jewish women. This tradition was supposed to have originated at a Rosh Chodesh group in Boston in 1989.²¹ Miriam’s Cups are now on sale in glass, silver, lacquered wood or pottery, often decorated with depictions of Miriam or verses referring to her participation in the Exodus.

Another new tradition is that of an orange on the *seder* plate. Why an orange? Biblical scholar Susannah Heschel²², Abraham Joshua Heschel’s²³ daughter, was challenged by a man when she lectured on women rabbis. “A woman belongs on the *bima* like an orange belongs on the *seder* plate,” he is supposed to have said. Thus did an orange on the *seder* plate become a symbol of women’s rights.

It is a nice story, but Heschel disagrees. She read a feminist Haggadah in the early 1980s which proposed placing a piece of bread on the *seder* plate to symbolise the need to include gays and lesbians in Jewish life. Heschel liked the idea of putting something new on the *seder* plate to represent suppressed voices, but definitely – definitely - not bread, so an orange became the symbol of all marginalised populations.²⁴

The Sukkot tradition of building flimsy temporary booths has also seen changes. The Israel Museum has a beautiful sukkah consisting of thirty painted panels copied from prayer books printed in Sulzbach, Germany, in 1826 and created c 1836 for the Deller family in Fischach, Bavaria, and smuggled out of Germany inside a wooden crate in 1934.²⁵ Painted sukkot might have been traditional in Germany but did not accompany the wandering Israelites. The fame of the sukkah belonging to D Polak Daniels, a warden of The Hague Jewish Congregation and a member of the Municipality and South Holland County Council, reached Queen Sophia, who wanted to see it. She was invited, spent a half-hour enjoying refreshments inside and on leaving said, “I take your word for a great deal, but you cannot make me believe that your ancestors in the desert lived in such splendid booths as this.”²⁶

The Chanukah tradition was to display *chanukiot* where passers-by could see them. Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg (13th Century) hung his metal one on his door. When it became dangerous to place these outside the home, the tradition changed and they were placed inside the house, necessitating a design modification to enable them to stand instead of hang. Once again - thanks to Chabad’s public lighting - *chanukiot* are back in the open.²⁷

Barmitzvah celebrations only became a fixed rite in 14th Century Germany. The most essential features in 16th Century Germany and Poland was laying tefillin and being called up to the Torah.²⁸ After the shul service there was as a *seudat mitzvah* in the boy's home. The barmitzvah boy's talk dates to the 16th Century and its purpose was to enable him to demonstrate his Talmudic knowledge - often written by the teacher and learnt by heart. In Morocco, he would walk among the guests after his talk holding his *tefillin* bag and they would throw in silver coins. These he would give his teacher!²⁹

Living precariously in Mediaeval Europe, exposed to threats of expulsion and confiscation caused by jealousy and greed, special sumptuary laws were introduced. The Council of Four Lands³⁰ (1650) ruled that only ten strangers could be invited, one of whom had to be a poor man. In Ancona, Italy (1766), only the family could attend the feast although well-wishers could be given coffee and sweetmeats.³¹ Guests would be taxed and fined if too many were invited.³² In Prague (1767), the only women who could be invited were the boy's mother, sisters, grandmothers and sisters-in-law – not aunts.³³

Barmitzvah traditions no longer include sumptuary laws, although Cape Town has a Simcha Fund for people willing to add a percentage for those unable to afford a celebration. With many displays of conspicuous consumption, it is a pity this does not become more of a tradition. One Frankfurt prohibition (1715) has been retained – that banning bar mitzvah boys from wearing wigs.³⁴

Another feature often found is that mentioned by Edmond Fleg, a Zurich *tzaddik's* son, who said he sang his *parsha* faultlessly in 1887 without understanding a word.³⁵

The old Jewish Museum in Cape Town contained a barmitzvah album given to an anonymous boy in Upington in 1948. It included a Bird's Eye View of Jewish History starting with Abraham and ending with the entry: *1941 – Ghettos for Jews are introduced in Poland by the Nazis, Nazis conquer Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. Jews' lot grows still worse.*

How dreadful is hindsight,

The barmitzvah boy had not filled in the pages meant for the theme of his speech or the rabbi's message, but he had listed his gifts: a meccano and monopoly set, two brush and comb sets, a writing set, hankies, books, money, two ties, that album and an air gun. No fountain pens - at one time they were so popular that a common joke was that the flustered boy started his speech: "Today I am a fountain pen."

Tradition disallowed women from participating directly in religious services. "Bat mitzvahs were not always an everyday tradition. Women had to fight for that right", wrote Jo-Ann Arnowitz, Florida Jewish Museum director.³⁶ The unfairness of this gender discrimination began percolating into the social conscience of communities in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries and special ceremonies were introduced in Italy, Eastern and Western Europe, Egypt, and Baghdad. The first American batmitzvah was held by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan in 1922³⁷ and it is now common even among some very Orthodox communities in Israel.

Rev A P Bender started Girls Confirmation Services in Cape Town in 1896,³⁸ reviving them as a batmitzvah in 1936.³⁹ As late as 1953 Rabbi Isaac Kossowsky was grumbling about the practice. In "The Batmitzvah Controversy" in the *Zionist Record*, he condemned them on grounds of the social aspect, believing they would prove to be the thin edge of the wedge separating the demarcation between Orthodox and Reform services. He also brought mixed choirs into his argument.

"The fact that some Orthodox congregations introduced [batmitzvahs] was no reason. The Yeoville Synagogue which is undoubtedly an Orthodox Synagogue had a mixed choir for many years and consecutive rabbis were powerless to do away with it until an opportune moment arrived for its abolition ... [this] should constitute a precedent for doing away with batmitzvahs".⁴⁰ Sixty years on, it has become an accepted tradition with no effect on synagogue affiliation.

I must be personal here. I was the first girl in the Northern Cape to celebrate a bat mitzvah.⁴¹ My photo appeared in the newspaper "Kimberley girl makes history". When it came to my daughter's batmitzvah, the thirteen mothers held regular meetings to discuss important issues such as whether the girls' white shoes should match and a speech teacher drilled them on enunciating and where to stand. After an Eisteddfod-type production to a packed shul one Sunday afternoon, each young lady in her matching dress went home to her party. A few months later we attended a cousin's batmitzvah in a Reform shul where she read her *parsha* and took the entire Shabbat service, as an equal member of the congregation. A far more meaningful rite of passage.

As far as Rabbi Kossowsky's comment on mixed choirs goes, here the tradition has changed from more lenient to more rigid. In the *Shulchan Aruch* Rabbi Karo merely stated that it was preferable while reciting the Shema not to hear a woman singing. As the centuries rolled on, the life

of Jews in the Russian Empire became more constrained and tradition-bound. Rigidity set in and the religious position of women diminished. Ignored was the exultant song sung by Miriam, Moses' sister, at the Red Sea. Forgotten was the idea that men might be distracted by hearing women's voices while reciting the Shema. Instead the blame was deflected onto women whose voices were deemed inherently indecent.⁴²

From the 1890s the pendulum swung. Jews moved into the emancipated West where they were exposed to music and music halls, Mendelssohn and Mahler, opera and Yiddish theatre, organs and mixed choirs, and synagogues started to follow suit.⁴³

I was given a photo of the Claremont Synagogue Choir in 1919. On the front steps stands the cantor in his tallis and ceremonial cap. On his right stand three young men, one still in short pants, wearing hats and *talleisim*. On his left stand three young women, one in a pinafore, wearing hats and black stockings - including the donor's husband and his sister.⁴⁴ The late Advocate Jules Browde was her son-in-law.

The wife of Emanuel Mendelssohn, the founder of Johannesburg's President Street Synagogue, was a soprano trained at the Berlin Conservatory of Music. They too had a mixed choir, led by Madame Mendelssohn. She sang a splendid aria from the composer Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah* at the synagogue's consecration in 1889.⁴⁵ Rabbi J H Herz, future Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, removed women from the choir in 1898 but never publicly condemned them.⁴⁶

My great-grandfather, a *chazan*, who kept a diary from 1892-1893, wrote witheringly of this choir. "The rabbi⁴⁷ who was also the cantor picked for himself a choir of beautiful girls, one after the other, who sang on the High Holy Days and with their pleasant voices gladdened the heart of the people who came to the *ma'ariv* prayers on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*. With this kind of promotion, they did very well and collected riches". As the opposing Park Synagogue "had not yet paid for the building, so they thought to make a choir of beautiful girls and then they would be saved. The choir was ready and their eyes were looking forward to salvation through the girls, only to their disappointment most of the worshippers in the new synagogue had foreign wives. To look for a great salvation to save Israel from its troubles cannot be done from foreign women and from foreign people."⁴⁸

There were ten synagogues in London with mixed choirs in the late 1940s and the chief rabbi attended services there. It has been argued that from the 1960s British Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie was under pressure

from an increasingly right-wing Beth Din and began to refuse to attend services with mixed choirs or to appoint rabbis to such synagogues.

His attitude was followed in South Africa, which has historically observed British practices - at one time the British Chief Rabbi was responsible for appointing rabbis to the British Colonies - until the Eastern European Jews arrived. They did not respect the concept of a Chief Rabbi or his authority and appointed their own rabbis from Europe. When Tikvath Israel was established in Cape Town in 1841, and wanted to import a *Sefer Torah*, they discovered that the permission of the Chief Rabbi was required. As Dr Solomon Herschell had recently died, they had to wait until a new one was appointed.⁴⁹

With Britain ruling most of Southern Africa, it did not take long for the Anglo-German Jews and then the Eastern European Jews to adapt British synagogue practices. Sermons, clerical dress, choral services, even the *siddurim* were those of Anglicized Judaism.⁵⁰ Likewise were mixed choirs, until the British Chief Rabbi, in what was considered a turn to the right, changed that tradition and banished the voices of the female majority, and the South African rabbis followed suit.

The last mixed choir in London was disbanded in 1986. In an article on the mixed choir controversy, Benjamin Elton argues that the laws on mixed singing contain flexibility that can and have been used when rabbis felt the situation demanded it. He believes there is considerable scope for re-assessment of the religious policy of the Chief Rabbis across a range of issues and Anglo-Jewry's religious development and the Chief Rabbinate's place in that development might require reconsideration.⁵¹

Traditional attitudes to art also veered between acceptance and prohibition. The Torah⁵² forbids making images,⁵³ although the text implies that this only applied to objects of worship.

Our traditions depend to a large extent on the environment in which the Jewish community lives. Where the social environment allowed representational art, Jews created it. Jews in Mediaeval Europe surrounded by Catholic neighbours with their multiplicity of icons and Holy Family statues opposed the creation of such images, although Jewish artists manufactured them and 13th Century Christian manuscripts have pictures referring to Midrashic legends indicating that the artists were Jewish.

In such an environment Judah the Pious (1140-1217) strictly prohibited any image making. R. Meir of Rothenberg (1215-1293)

regarded illustrations as distracting from the text.⁵⁴ In the German Bird's Head Haggadah (c. 1300) Jews have birds' heads while non-Jews, like Pharaoh, are face-less.⁵⁵

Rabbinic Judaism's belief in that prohibition was shattered by the discovery in one of the oldest synagogues in the world, the Dura Europos synagogue, completed in 244 C.E., of figurative wall paintings. There, in vivid Technicolor, was the Binding of Isaac, Moses in the bulrushes, Moses receiving the Tablets of the law, Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt, the vision of Ezekiel and other images.⁵⁶ If human figures appeared on synagogue walls, they would have been permitted in houses and manuscripts.

As more and more mosaic synagogue floors were uncovered in Israel it was realised that figurative representations were a normal feature of synagogue decoration. The floors at the Huqoq synagogue (4th-6th Centuries) shows Samson; the Tzippori (late 5th or early 6th Century) and the Beit Alfa synagogues (6th Century) portray the Binding of Isaac.

Even in Mediaeval Europe, such prohibitions were ignored because Jews were to some extent culturally assimilated and began to share in the artistic outlook of their neighbours. Glückel of Hameln (1646-1724) described the long-running legal battle her father-in-law had with his son-in-law's stepfather, Feibisch Gans, over missing documents. Feibisch put her father-in-law in prison, and he did the same to Feibisch. When they ran out of money, they went to the Beth Din.

"The rabbis... came", wrote Glückel, "they pondered the case at due length, but they accomplished nothing – except to depart with fat fees. One of these rabbinical judges from Gelnhausen made off with enough to build for himself a handsome study-room; and he had painted on its wall three or four rabbis in their clerical hats, plucking the feathers from a goose."⁵⁷ (Gans is Yiddish for goose.)

The Muslim world banned all representational art. Jews living among them followed suit and their art was non-representational. Spanish rabbis prohibited art. The *Sefer HaChinnuch*⁵⁸ emphasised that it was forbidden to make likenesses of a human being, even for ornament. Maimonides forbade three-dimensional humans - but not animals - and allowed two-dimensional humans in painting and tapestries.⁵⁹

The prejudice against representational art dwindled, and in the end almost disappeared. Rabbi Kook believed that Van Gogh reached spiritual achievements when he painted.⁶⁰ Portrait painting and photography have come to be generally – though not quite universally – tolerated. In the 1990s, Jerusalem streets were plastered with images of the late Lubavitch Rabbi Menachem Mendel

Schneerson, proclaiming him Messiah.⁶¹

However, for some groups, change is slower. After all, if a woman's voice is dangerous to men, how much more so is a woman's picture? The New York Haredi newspaper *Yated Ne'eman* which does not sully its pages with pictures of women, finally buckled in 2016 when it came to Hilary Clinton. They published a photo of her arm.⁶² As she did not become president, there will be no need to show both arms.

Today in Israel one will find Catholic shops with framed pictures of Mary or Jesus next door to Sephardic shops with framed pictures of long-dead Sephardi scholars and R. Schneerson's photo adorns practically every Chabad household - not to mention pizza parlours, barbershops and mom-and-pop stores run by admirers or followers".⁶³

Is there any difference?

Changes are slow but they do happen. Women have traditionally been responsible for preparing food for the family, yet could not serve in Israel as kosher supervisors. In 2014 the Chief Rabbinate allowed this after a petition by the Emunah advocacy group to the Supreme Court.⁶⁴ Women may now say *kaddish* for their deceased parent following a halachic ruling from Rev Ovadia Yosef revealed by his grandson (2011)⁶⁵ and from the Orthodox rabbinical organisation Beit Hillel (2013).⁶⁶

To quote Tevya again, "Traditions, traditions. Without our traditions, our lives would be as shaky as... as... as a fiddler on the roof! Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years. Here in Anatevka, we have traditions for everything: how to sleep, how to eat... how to work... how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered, and always wear a little prayer shawl that shows our constant devotion to G-d... and because of our traditions... Every one of us knows who he is and what G-d expects him to do".

Life in the 21st Century has altered dramatically since the days when the rabbis in Babylon and Mediaeval Europe, faced with other dramatic changes, modified traditions to suit the period in which they were living.

One of the reasons why the Jewish community has kept its identity as a people for so many centuries is that we have been able to adapt our traditions to the current reality while keeping our core beliefs intact. Those changes helped to keep our faith relevant.

Change still happens - it just takes time.

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THE FORGOTTEN ANTI-APARTHEID SEDERS

*

Debra Orolowitz

If I am not for myself...

The theme of freedom is not subtle in the Passover *Seder*. The holiday itself is known as *Z'Man Cheruteinu* ('the Time of our Freedom'). Arguably, the keynote theme of the *Seder* service is that "each Jew... should regard himself as having been personally freed from Egyptian bondage", as stated in the *Haggadah*.¹ This assertion can be confusing. What part of the many courses, laughter or beautiful table settings is supposed to hint at a background of slavery? Even the symbols that directly relate to our bondage (such as leaning, or tasting salt water or *cheroset*) might not make us *feel* like slaves. One might ask how we can place ourselves in the metaphorical shoes of the Israelites: as they laboured for long hours in the heat; when they cried out to God in pain; when they scoffed at Moses; as they witnessed the plagues; and the eventual gift of freedom (only to be met with the Red Sea). This is a difficult task, considering the time, space and contextual differences between the Biblical event and the 21st Century. It is made even more problematic by the political climate. An example of this is celebrating *Pesach* as a free people, while most of the population is denied basic rights – the irony is clear. This was seen in our own recent history. During apartheid, the South African Jewish community was able to celebrate Passover in relative security, while most of the population were not considered free.

Conversely, the *Seder* can be used to actively draw attention to these contradictions. The ritual alters to address more than communal freedom; it becomes a tool of awareness about *lack* of freedoms. This change in purpose is known as ritualisation. Public *Seders* were used in South Africa concerning apartheid. The first of these was the Cape Town-based "Freedom *Seders*" between 1986 and 1988, which drew the Jewish community's

attention to the political climate at the time. The aim was to educate and mobilise. Founded on the premise that the individual must recognise his or her personal exodus, the *Seders* compared the historical Jewish narrative to the oppression of South Africa's majority. They were organised by a small anti-apartheid organisation called Jews for Justice (JFJ). Despite drawing large crowds and prominent speakers, the Freedom *Seders* have been largely forgotten. In comparison to the many years of apartheid, their lifespan was brief. However, they clearly draw attention to bigger themes of how the Jewish community negotiated politics, freedoms and religious duties during apartheid.

If I am not for others...

The first South African Freedom *Seder* was hosted at the Albow Centre in Gardens on 28 April 1986. On the panel at the head table were Prof Dennis Davis, Rabbi Selwyn Franklin and the two speakers, Dr Allan Boesak and Dr John Simon. Franklin's involvement cannot be stressed enough. As the leader of the Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation and a founding member of JFJ, he had the religious authority to design and conduct the ritual aspects of the *Seder*.² In fact, the whole event was his brainchild.

Aside from the traditional Passover symbols (such as the *Seder* plate, *matzah* and *Haggadot*), it arguably looked more like a political meeting than a religious event.³ This was because it was aimed at both Jewish community members and the wider community. Although JFJ was small, they secured high-profile speakers, who in turn drew a nearly totally Jewish crowd of approximately 500. As a founding member of the United Democratic Front (UDF), an influential Christian leader and proponent of liberation theology, Boesak was a vocal anti-apartheid activist. Simon was the former chairperson of the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies and signified a Jewish authority.

The evening began with a *Seder* ceremony, followed by the speakers and concluding with an opportunity for questions. The *Seder* introduction acted as a framework for the rest of the evening. This did not change the fundamental aspects of the traditional

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Seder (such as *Ma Nishtana* and *Dayeinu*, and references to symbols such as *matzah* and *maror*).⁴ Had the process of ritualisation altered the *Seder* beyond recognition, the audience would have been far less receptive. Unconventionally, some traditional aspects were directly correlated with the situation in South Africa. For example, the traditional ten plagues of Egypt were associated with the “ten plagues” of apartheid, such as rubber bullets, tear gas and forced removals.⁵ The traditional four glasses of wine, which reminded the participants of the four promises of redemption, were also made more pertinent. These particular promises were of “liberation from the shackles of a wicked regime”, “deliverance from the clutches of apartheid to the dignity of freedom”, “that [God] will see that the oppressed are redeemed” and of God’s “active intervention on behalf of those who are denied the right to act on their own behalf”.⁶ The *Seder* was not merely symbolic; it was also structured as a prayer. God was referenced as “the Holy One, blessed be He”, and the ritual was concluded with ‘amen’. Not lasting more than thirty minutes, the liturgy acted as an introduction, firmly positioning the theme from which the two guest speakers would elaborate.

Boesak, the first speaker, framed Passover as being an important time for both the Christian and Jewish communities, using the book of Deuteronomy to draw “God’s direction and promises” of freedom and liberation. The statement “Let My People Go” was used in reference to both the “virtual slavery” of the Black people in South Africa, and the physical slavery of the Israelites in Egypt. He lamented having not seen the level of resistance against apartheid from the local Jewish community that he would have expected. Boesak ended his talk with a prayer that God would open their hearts. Simon spoke next. Significantly, he highlighted that there was a new appreciation for Passover owing to the rise of the new generation and the rethinking of the traditional symbolism. Jews for Justice, he stressed, was a *Jewish* organisation and the fight against apartheid should therefore be fuelled by an understanding of the scriptures and the traditions. Simon touched on fear in the community, but outlined the Jewish task in South Africa as being directed by Genesis 18 (to “do justice and righteousness”), which he emphasised by repeating in Hebrew.

The feedback at the evening was mixed, varying between support, criticism and uncertainty. The applause and a few jokes (made both by the panellists and audience members) can be contrasted with some confrontational comments. When one unimpressed responder could not be heard by

many in the audience, Davis wryly quipped the he should “take the [microphone], we’re very democratic here”.⁷

The 1987 *Seder* was hosted on 8 April, days before Passover proper began, and followed a similar format. Former members describe it as having been an “unqualified success” and the “most quintessential” JFJ meeting. Despite the biting cold, it drew an estimated crowd of between 600 and 1000 people (including the roughly 100 to 150 of JFJ’s “usual activists”).⁸ The audience included such influential figures as Mervyn Smith and Myra Osrin, and has been considered a fair sample of the community.⁹ It was the keynote speaker, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who drew this large audience. Well-known and controversial, his reputation amongst white South Africans was complex. While he had won the Nobel Peace prize three years prior, he had also unpopularity called for economic sanctions.¹⁰ Added to this were his connections with Palestinian organisations and rumoured antisemitism.¹¹ Memories of the crowd’s attitude towards Tutu range from ‘responsive’, ‘respectful’ and ‘supportive’ to tangibly hostile.¹²



Significantly, the second *Freedom Seder* was the first time Tutu spoke on a Jewish platform in South Africa.¹³ One committee member, Dr Sally Frankental, remembered the excitement that many in JFJ felt about his doing so. It gave credibility to JFJ, she said, that it had “the ability [to] invite and have

the invitation accepted” by such people.¹⁴ Tutu is considered to have spoken well, clearly and charmingly. He started with a light-hearted joke, which lessened the perceived hostility.¹⁵ His tone quickly became more serious. The “suffering of the majority in South Africa” was compared to “the ancient Jewish experience of oppression in Egypt”.¹⁶ Being the “chosen people”, he emphasized, implied responsibility and not privilege.¹⁷ Much of the language that Tutu used was akin to that of Liberation Theology, such as citing the Bible as being a ‘subversive’ text, stating that “God is concerned with the underprivileged and the oppressed” and that “the God of the Exodus is a God of liberation”.¹⁸ Davis later recalled how patient Tutu was in his conduct and how willing he was to answer any questions directed towards him.¹⁹

The last Freedom *Seder* was held in 1988. As he was preparing for his imminent immigration to Australia, Rabbi Franklin was not involved, and this event was not the same without his enthusiasm and drive. It also meant the absence of an Orthodox rabbi to lead the liturgy. The ‘88 Freedom *Seder*’s structure was limited to the two speakers and questions from the floor.²⁰ Although the speakers were still influential (they included, the then president of the Black Sash, Mary Burton), the event had lost much momentum.

Why are these *Seders* significant?

The Exodus carries great religious and historical weight for the Jewish people, and indeed, is one of the core events of Judaism. Although we highlight the event of Passover, it is expressed through other holidays (such as *Sukkot*) and countless times in the Scriptures. We are reminded not to be harsh with the foreigner, to be righteous, to hate injustice and to ultimately recognise that we owe our salvation and freedom to God. The Exodus narrative, therefore, identifies what we are supposed to do (individually and communally), because God did it for us first.

The Exodus also has cultural importance. Internationally, the *Seder* is arguably the most widely practiced Jewish ceremony.²¹ This is also true of South Africa. A census in the mid-1970s showed that 94% of South African Jewry celebrated the *Seder* meal in some form. This can be contrasted with a study done twenty years later, in which 93% took part.²² It is also arguably one of the most visible Jewish holidays in South Africa. This not only indicates a wide awareness of the tradition, but implies that the *Seder* was prevalent in the South African Jewish consciousness in the 1980s.

The members of JFJ were aware of the

Seder’s religious, cultural and historical importance. It was recognised as the appropriate time to focus on the plight of oppressed people. This was reflected in interviews, newsletters and the Freedom *Seder*’s *Haggadah*.²³ The *Haggadah* framed the *Seder* as traditionally being “designed to stimulate many questions” as “it is [one’s] duty to be informed and to inform others”.²⁴ The religious relevance meant that the impetus to fight apartheid was not framed as being ‘militant’ or ‘political’, but rather as a religious duty. This created a “safe space” at the Freedom *Seders*, for many would not have been “seen dead” at any other JFJ event.²⁵ This religious duty would either be encouraged by conviction (“because we were slaves in Egypt”) or by recognising cognitive dissonance (the fact that the Jewish community had been celebrating freedom in an oppressive system).²⁶ For this reason, Davis argued that the *Seders* were the “most profound in terms of a *direct engagement* with the community”.²⁷ They succeeded because a Jewish organisation was engaging with a Jewish audience about a political issue through a Jewish framework. By highlighting an absence of freedom in the framework of Jewish tradition, the *Seder* mobilisation around an anti-apartheid message was clearer and more easily received.

As recounted above, both Boesak and Tutu addressed this issue of religious duty during their talks. Liberation Theology started in the 1960s in reaction to apartheid, peaking in the mid-1980s.²⁸ As a result, this time saw a spike in religiously-motivated political groups (most of which were involved in the UDF). They were so prevalent that by 1986, Davis argued that every major religious or ethnic group had responded to apartheid “in terms of their own heritages”.²⁹ JFJ, formed in 1985, was the first *Jewish* organisation to actively resist apartheid. It asserted that Judaism had a lot to offer in terms of social justice and morality, that apartheid was unjust and that it was their imperative to act.³⁰ Some JFJ members were considered trouble-makers and dissidents.³¹ They were criticised for singling themselves out as a Jewish organisation that actively resisted apartheid, told that it was dangerous to draw attention to the Jewish community and reminded that there had “never been a shortage of Jews” involved in the Struggle.³² So why did the mid-1980s see a rise in Jewish activism? It can be viewed in light of several compounded factors, such as increased Jewish support for the National Party; a perceived communal silence on apartheid; international activism; new and proactive leadership; and passionate South African Jews who felt that their causes were not represented in the community.

It is also worth reiterating the role of fear, as it dictated much of the behaviour of JFJ members and the Jewish community at large. The Holocaust, already a formative event in the identity of South African Jews, and a history of discrimination both fuelled and hindered anti-apartheid activism. This religious activism in reaction to apartheid (and its responses) raised an important question for the Cape Town Jewish community in the 1980s: For whom was it responsible? This highlights the tensions between “universalist ideals” (helping all people) versus “Jewish particularity” (looking out for the Jewish population first).³³ Boesak and Tutu (as well as many JFJ members) argued that the Jewish community should fight against *all* injustices.

Although the Freedom *Seder* was the first of its kind in South Africa, the notion of *Seders* speaking to current concerns had started some sixty years before. The “Third *Seder*” – as opposed to the religious first or second night – was usually conducted in a public space and was traditionally held either before or during the intermediate days of Passover. The first Third *Seders* were held at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York in the 1920s. Early on, they were secularised and reflected contemporary issues.³⁴ In the 1960s, the Third *Seder* was actively used as a tool of protest and awareness. For example, the concept of a “Freedom *Seder*” was used both by the Civil Rights movement and the American Soviet Jewry movement. By drawing on the themes of slavery and freedom, these ritualisations could focus on political causes without straying from the essence of a *Seder*. In contrast, the only Third *Seders* in South Africa until the mid-1980s were in memory of the Holocaust. Although this was a poignant way to commemorate it, there was no need to persuade toward political activism. Because the Freedom *Seder*, as a concept, was probably unfamiliar to most South African Jews, the impact would have been more powerful, especially as it highlighted personal responsibilities.

Despite the Freedom *Seder* being novel, the comparisons between modern-day oppressions and Israelites’ slavery was very familiar. The reasons for these comparisons differed: to raise money, to encourage *Aliyah*, to educate, and so on. By the 1970s, this had become a common occurrence, with popular comparisons being to the Soviet Jewry’s plight and the brutality of the Holocaust. The comparison between the oppressive regimes in South Africa and ancient Egypt gained momentum in the 1980s. This strengthened to the degree that even the SA Jewish Board of Deputies used the analogy – for example, in a statement titled “*Pesach* Freedom Statement”. According to the report, it was a “matter of concern

that not everyone enjoyed the same degree of freedom”. While freedom was associated with the Jewish people’s “delivery from Egyptian bondage, the concept is universal and also applies to mankind”.³⁵ This Exodus-apartheid analogy grew to such a degree that Chief Rabbi Harris addressed it in one of his editorials in 1988.³⁶ He wrote that an imagination was central to appreciating the lessons of Passover and for promoting Jewish causes. However, Rabbi Harris also argued that clichéd analogies could make people blasé to causes. His editorial shows that the community was overly-familiar with the vast use of Exodus analogies in this time frame. It is, therefore, through the arguably clichéd framework of Exodus analogies, that the creation of *Seder* mobilisation was to be expected. Such mobilisation would refresh the use of analogy by appropriating it in a different way. This was even emphasised during the Freedom *Seders*. At the 1986 Freedom *Seder*, Simon hinted at new ways of appropriating the Exodus narrative when he stated that there was fresh interpretation of Passover and that the symbols were being re-examined.

The JFJ Freedom *Seders* only lasted for three years, between 1986 and 1988. Why was this so? The answer is simple. Some of those interviewed for this article argue that JFJ should have started ten years before it did. However, because it was only formed in the mid-80s, there was little chance of any Freedom *Seder* happening before then. Because of the nature of the organisation, a Freedom *Seder* was the perfect tool to reach the Jewish community. The added pressure of Rabbi Franklin moving to Australia left the organisation without a clear mission or leadership. Finally – and most obviously – Apartheid ended within years of JFJ starting. The *Seders* were created to draw attention to the lack of freedoms in the nation. With the unbanning of political parties and the release of political prisoners (most notably Nelson Mandela) in 1990, there was little need for them to continue. This did not mean the end of the “Freedom *Seder*” as a concept, however. For the next 30 years, the South African Freedom *Seders* would go on to celebrate, to promote, to mobilise and to educate. Some notable *Seders* have celebrated the end of apartheid, championed the interfaith movement and have drawn attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Despite the original Freedom *Seders* being somewhat controversial and short in lifespan, they transformed the Cape Jewish community, in terms of rethinking religious duty and practice. This would have been impossible without the traditional, yet relevant themes of the *Seder* and its wide practice. By

JEWS FOR JUSTICE

CAPE TOWN 1987 (5748)

F R E E D O M S E D E R

We have gathered together tonight to celebrate our annual freedom seder. At this time, while preparing for the Passover Festival, we give thanks to the Eternal for the great act of liberation, the Exodus from Egypt, and for preserving us to this day. This annual feast of freedom is forever linked to our passion for justice and human liberty.

It is the duty of every one of us to remember that we personally have been released from slavery and to show concern for those around us who are still enslaved. The scripture tells us: AND THOU SHALT NARRATE IT TO THY SON ON THAT DAY, SAYING: "IT IS BECAUSE OF THAT WHICH THE LORD DID FOR ME WHEN I WENT FORTH OUT OF EGYPT."

The open door at the passover seder, inviting the entrance of the prophet Elijah, herald of the Messiah, recalls the obligation incumbent upon every Jew to help bring about a world of absolute freedom for all people, and provides us with the hope of attaining this ideal.

During the Seder we drink four cups of wine to remind us of the four promises of redemption mentioned in the Bible.

We drink the first cup of wine to the first promise; "AND I WILL SET YOU FREE FROM THE BURDENS OF LABOR IN EGYPT", the promise of liberation from the shackles of a wicked regime.

(Sip some wine)

The sequence of ritual on Pesach night is unusual. The seder (Hebrew word for order) is specially designed to be different so as to stimulate many questions. It is our duty to be informed and to inform others.

"WHY IS THIS NIGHT DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER NIGHTS ? "

For on all other nights we eat leavened bread or matzah, but on this night we eat only matzah, the bread of the poor and oppressed with whom each one of us must identify since we too were slaves in Mitzraim (Egypt).

For on all other nights we eat all kinds of herbs, but on this night we eat bitter herbs to sharpen our awareness of the lives of those who are unfree.

For on all other nights we do not dip even once, but on this night we dip twice in salt water to share in the tears of those who are suffering.

For on all other nights we sit straight, but on this night we all recline as a symbol of our faith in the eventual liberation when all will be able to recline as free people.

1.

further incorporating present trends (such as the Exodus-apartheid comparison and the wider framework of Liberation Theology), as well as introducing the new practice of the Third *Seder*, the perceived limitations of the *Seder* were challenged. The *Seder* can now celebrate individual freedoms more effectively, by highlighting and mobilising against contemporary injustices.

NOTES

- 1 A Guide to Passover, 58, 91
- 2 Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice, 116, 130, 131, 137, 206; Interview with Glen Heneck, 1 September 2015
- 3 Interview with Sally Frankental, 5/14 August 2015
- 4 Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015
- 5 Freedom Seder Haggadah, 1987
- 6 Ibid.; Passover: its History and Practices, 54, 55
- 7 Freedom Seder audiotape, 1986
- 8 "Tutu Addresses Jews for Justice Freedom Seder", 1987; Interview with Glen Heneck, 1 September 2015; Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015
- 9 Let My People Go speech, 8 April 1987; "Tutu speaker at Freedom Seder", May 1987; Interview with Glen Heneck, 1 September 2015; Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015
- 10 Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015
- 11 Community and Conscience, 168
- 12 Interview with Glen Heneck, 1 September 2015; Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015
- 13 "Tutu Addresses Jews for Justice Freedom Seder", 1987
- 14 Interview with Sally Frankental, 5 / 14 August 2015
- 15 Interview with Glen Heneck, 1 September 2015; Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015
- 16 "Tutu Addresses Jews for Justice Freedom Seder", 1987
- 17 Let My People Go speech, 8 April 1987
- 18 "Tutu speaker at Freedom Seder", May 1987; Let My People Go speech, 8 April 1987; "Archbishop Tutu", 2 April 1987
- 19 Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015
- 20 Freedom Seder audiotape, 1988
- 21 A Feast of History, 13
- 22 Community and Conscience, 227, 240
- 23 Interview with Sally Frankental, 5 / 14 August 2015; Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015; "Archbishop Tutu", 2 April 1987; "New look at festival of freedom", March or April 1986
- 24 Freedom Seder Haggadah, 1987
- 25 Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015; Interview with Sally Frankental, 5 / 14 August 2015
- 26 Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015
- 27 Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015
- 28 The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology, 183
- 29 "New look at festival of freedom", probably March or April 1986
- 30 Ibid.; "The Constitution"; Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015
- 31 Interview with Sally Frankental, 5 / 14 August 2015; Interview with Dennis Davis, 8 September 2015
- 32 'Reform and South African Jews', February 1986
- 33 Jews in South Africa, 82; Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation, 111
- 34 Third Seder of the Arbeter Ring
- 35 "Board issues Pesach Freedom Statement", April 1988; 'Pesach-Freedom', March/April 1988
- 36 "The Chief Rabbi's Message", March 1988



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LAMEDVOVNIKS – THE THIRTY-SIX JUST MEN

*

Cecil Bloom

There is a very old Jewish legend to the effect that every generation has thirty-six saints on whose piety the fate of the world depends. The Book of Proverbs (10:25) provides an early source for the belief that the Just Man is the basis of the existence of the world: “When the storm wind passes, the wicked is no more but the righteous is an everlasting foundation”, that is to say, the righteous man holds up and supports the world just as the foundations of a building support it. Another source for the legend is from the *Mishnaic* period (1st –2nd Century): “When the *Tzaddikim* come to the world, good comes to the world and misfortune is removed but when the righteous pass away disaster comes and goodness leaves the world” (*Tosefta* Tractate *Sofa* ch10 paral). The *Tosefta* goes into some detail to make this clearer.

The earliest specific reference to this phenomenon is the Babylonian Talmud, which attributes to a 4th Century Babylonian teacher, Abbaye, the statement that “there are not less than thirty-six righteous men in every generation who receive the *Shechinah* [the Divine Presence]. It is written, happy are all they that wait for Him” (Sanhedrin 97b; Sukkot 45a). The Hebrew for ‘Him’ (הוּ - *lamedvov*) also represents the number thirty-six in Hebrew numerology, and this provides the basis for the number of saints. The number may also be derived from the verse in the Book of Isaiah (30:18), “Happy are all they who hope for Him”, which has been interpreted to mean, “Happy are all those who hope for the thirty-six”, that is, who rely on these thirty-six Just Men. There is a less well-accepted belief that there are seventy-two saints. The Zohar points to Hosea 10:2, which reads, “Their heart is divided”. With the Hebrew word for ‘their heart’ - לִבָּם - having in *gematria* the numerical value of seventy-two, this has drawn the conclusion that thirty-six saints are in *Eretz Israel* and thirty-six in the Diaspora.

At first the Talmud viewed *lamedvovniks*

merely as being good individuals. Later, however, they began to be seen as hidden saints and many legends circulated about them. Unrecognised by their fellow men and unknown even to each other, they are said to pursue humble occupations, such as artisans or water-carriers. They do not admit their identity to anyone and, if challenged, would deny membership of the order. It is said that the Vilna *Gaon* was once asked if he was a *lamedvovnik* and replied that he was indeed one, but was “fifth on the list” because he was “a bit famous”. However, this story must surely be apocryphal.

The Almighty is said to replace a *lamedvovnik* immediately on such a person’s death. A Just Man is believed to emerge and use his hidden powers when a Jewish community is threatened with serious trouble but returns to obscurity once his task is completed. This has given rise to the notion that a stranger suddenly appearing but who seems to be somewhat mysterious may be a *lamedvovnik*. Several legends claim that one of the thirty-six is the Messiah, who will reveal himself when the time is ripe. Others hold that as soon as a hidden Just Man is discovered, he dies.

It has been argued that the number thirty-six derives from sources other than those given above. One is that it comes from ancient astrology, where the 360 degrees of the heavenly circle are divided into 36 units of ‘deans’ and these deans were looked upon as guardians of the universe. Another theory is that 36 is the square of 6, which is said to be the symbol of the created world in Alexandrian Jewish philosophy. Neither of these theories is particularly convincing. However, little research appears to have been carried out to identify conclusively the legend’s origin.

The *lamedvovnik* tradition is an Ashkenazi belief. Sephardim do not recognize it, albeit that it has been present in Kabbalistic literature from the 16th Century and in Hassidic legend from the late 18th Century. There are two 18th Century Kabbalistic books whose authors, R. Neta of Szinawa and R. Eisik, a *shochet* in Przemyśl, have been described as being *lamedvovniks*. *Hassidim* recognize two categories of saint – those who work in full view and the hidden ones who belong to a higher order of men.

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Tales of *lamedvovniks* are widespread, particularly in Hassidic literature, and the noted Hassidic scholar, Martin Buber, also introduced *lamedvovniks* into some of his tales. Some Hassidic tales emphasise the role of the saint behind a boorish or uncouth façade, a theme also used in some stories of the Baal Shem Tov. Apparently, this was to make people believe that a noble soul could live within every man – one should not draw conclusions from simple visual experience. Prominent writers from Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav in the 18th Century to 20th Century ones of the stature of S.Y. Agnon and Elie Wiesel have been attracted to the subject. R. Nachman's *The Prince who was made entirely of Precious Stones* introduces us to two *lamedvovniks* who, on different occasions, helped a king to begat a daughter and a son and also to save the son from disaster. In Agnon's *The Hidden Tzaddik*, the *lamedvovnik* is a stove maker who wants to be buried "in a plot where the stillborn are buried" and whose grave should not be marked with a tombstone. Agnon followed the tradition faithfully but R. Nachman's tale indicated that others knew of

the identity of the two *lamedvovniks* because it was only when the king ordered the Jewish community to help him that the two saints were produced. Elie Wiesel's *One of the Just Men* also abandons the idea that the identity of these men is hidden. By contrast, Albert Memmi keeps to the traditional view in his *The Unrecognised Just Men*.

One novel on the subject, Andre Schwartz-Bart's *The Last of the Just*, achieved best-seller status in 1960. Ernie Levy, a descendant of the 12th Century Rav Yom Tov Levy, is depicted as being one of the Just Men, inheriting the honour through his family line. The story of the Levy family begins in York, England, in 1185, going on to cover the Inquisition and pogroms in Kiev and many other outrages. Ernie is the last of the line and he is destroyed in Hitler's gas chambers. Schwartz-Bart's interpretation of the legend is a controversial one because the honour of being a *lamedvovnik* is not one that is handed down from father to son. Nevertheless the novel, which won the prestigious *Prix Goncourt*, France's most important literary award, gave rise to much interest in the legend.

UNFORGETTABLY
Delicious
UNDENIABLY
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THE RECORD PLAYER - MEMORIES OF MUSIC, MELODIES AND MENSCHEN

*

Charlie Nates

I was born in 1934 to parents who had left Lithuania and immigrated to Cape Town in the late 1920s. When I turned eight, we moved into our very own home in the Gardens area of the city, where I attended school. The English language presented great problems to my Yiddish-speaking parents - *and* to me, as it was a great embarrassment when I noticed the looks that people sometimes gave them when they spoke.

An assortment of furniture was left in our new home by the previous owners. In one corner of the sitting room stood a four-legged rosewood record playing machine. The cabinet was red in colour with inlays in its façade and stood about one metre in height.

In order to operate the machine, one needed to lift the lid on top to access the record player and also open the two doors in front in order to allow the sound to be heard. Being of pre-electric vintage, it was even by the standards of those times pretty old, and there was no power plug to be seen. It had to be hand-wound continually in order to maintain its correct speed of 78 revolutions per minute. It was also necessary to change the metal needles every so often whenever they lost their point and made the record sound even scratchier.

The records in those days were '78's' and were constructed from shellac - either 10 or 12 inches in diameter. Our particular records had the distinction of being either badly scratched or cracked - or both - which necessitated the lifting of the record player arm and shifting it to the other side of the crack.

And as fate would have it, this all became my job.

The majority of our records were discovered in a drawer of the rosewood cabinet which the previous owners had left - and as they were all Jewish records, one can draw one's own conclusions. However, our collection was also supplemented by the careful purchasing of pre-used ones sold by a Mr. Rosen (as was advertised on his records) whose business

was in District 6. These records were sans covers, and, together with our original lot, lay one on top of another to great heights and comprised of several stacks strategically placed on our oak sideboard.

Some of the more favoured records had been played so often that the flip side could be heard coming through. Nonetheless, it appeared that either we had the finest collection of records or possessed the only record player in the neighbourhood, as visitors came often to listen to them - and I don't have to mention that our record collection consisted only of Yiddish or Hebrew discs - the two languages I did not want to learn and was not so keen on hearing.

Cars were a luxury in those days and whenever I heard the cacophony of broken accents approaching the house on foot, I would attempt a swift disappearing act. But by then, all exits were blocked and the music lovers would descend on me, blessing me for giving up playing outside in the sunshine with my pals to be with them ... "*A gezunt af dayn keppale*"¹ they would praise me ... "*such a gute ingale!*"²

I would then accompany them to the sitting room where overcoats, scarves, thick jerseys etc. were removed and where I would position myself to 'work the record player.'

After much bickering and arguing and observations that "*mayn klein eynikel zint's besser*"³ or "*ekh mir a zinger*"⁴, a record was finally selected. Of course, all these records were labelled in Yiddish or Hebrew and part of my duties was to find it - and quickly too ... and not only to identify the record but also play the right side! And once the correct side of the correct record was playing, I was constantly instructed and reminded to "*vind it kvikly*" should the speed slacken.

Who were the favourite artistes in those days? If I recall correctly, they included Gershon Sirota, Moishe Oysher, Moshe Koussevitzky, Mordechai Hirshman and P. Pinchuk. I am not sure now whether Max Perlman, Chayale Rosenthal and Molly Picon were being played then or later, but the favoured discs were "*Kol Nidrei*", "*Eli Eli*" and "*Rosinkes Mit Mandelen*" (which, although I would not actually admit to it

Charlie Nates has an affinity for music and nature. His lifelong hobbies include painting, sculpture and writing.

at the time, I really liked).

Depending from where one hailed – be it Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Latvia or Germany – so did the accents vary – and the immigrants from the different countries did not always get along. In fact, they were more often than not, extremely critical and jealous of one another.

I could not help noting the comments after one or another of the party departed: “Stuck up Yekke” ... “dumb Pollak” ‘stupid Litvak’ ... “From good music dey know from nothing -- und der eccents!”

Some truly strange characters graced our musical interludes. There was one old aunt who always wore the same hat which boasted a feather on top of it. She unfortunately had a bad case of ‘the shakes’ and the feather on her hat trembled faster and faster in time to the music as it sped up. Alongside her was her ‘*shwester*’ who doused herself in bottles of eau de cologne. Always seated in the far corner was an aunt who would draw me into her arms and kiss the top of my head whenever I was near. Another old lady across from her was forever showing off photographs of her grandchildren. She would even accost strangers in the street to let them have a look-see.

There was an elderly uncle with a very long nose – but unfortunately no nose for music; and another uncle who would await a loud passage of music to hawk into a handkerchief. (He *knew* his music!) ... Best of all, was my uncle Gershon, who always slipped me a penny – now there was a gentleman!

I almost neglected to mention the one who always toted what looked like a toilet seat with him – except that it was made of rubber and when he sat on it ever so slowly, he would close his eyes and whisper “*oy vey*”. And whenever we left our music room, the general comment was “*ot gayt Kalman der killer!*” Bela Lugosi, Boris Karlof, Frankenstein – they were killers; but uncle Kalman?! Never! Surely a killer would carry a gun or a knife. But a toilet seat? Never!!

Only years later did I learn that the word ‘killer’ – ‘*killa*’ in Yiddish – actually meant ‘hernia’.

I also realise now that the majority of aunts and uncles were not, in fact, related to me.

In those days, women did not smoke – but the men more than made up for them. Russian tea was taken by all, sugar cubes placed in mouth, the cup and saucer balanced on the knee. The men, however, had an ashtray on the other. The cheapest and most popular cigarette brand of the day was Cavalla in the green packet. In order

for people to breathe as well, the windows were always wide open – thus were our non-Jewish friends also treated to the music.

Later, the men would retire to another room where a serious game of ‘*korten*’ (either solo or *klabberjas*) would commence. Because they played for money, tempers sometimes wore thin and profanities uttered: “*in drerd mayn gelt*”⁵ or “*ihh hob drekishe korten vayter!*”⁶ A really big loser could total five shillings in an evening – and his wife would half murder him when he got home!

About 15 years later, my dear father having passed away earlier, his sisters and brother whom I had never met visited us from Argentina. They spoke only Spanish and Yiddish and I stood there feeling at a loss at being unable to communicate with my own flesh and blood. And then suddenly, without warning, the very language which I had denied and of which I had felt ashamed when I was much younger, came forth from only knows where, and I was able to make myself understood by speaking Yiddish!

... And as I spoke it, I found myself crying.

I could not fathom what had come over me at that time, but several decades later, after my dear mother and all those marvellous ‘uncles’ and ‘aunties’ had passed away, did I fully realise just how much I missed them all – and the music that they loved. Nor, at that time, did I appreciate that these wonderful ‘larger than life’ people had come to a new country with no money, no language, no nothing. Yet had singlehandedly built up a life for themselves and their families despite untold hardships.

It was George Bernard Shaw who claimed that ‘youth was wasted on the young’.

Whenever the *yorzeit* of my parents comes around and I recite the *kaddish*, I remember them sitting amidst their *chaverim* gathered around the old record player, sharing their wonderfully expressive common tongue and savouring the music that emanated from the marvellous 78 records which gave them so much joy

I can still see them. I still hear them – the lyrics of their language; the lilt of their accents; the lift of their laughter. I am so grateful that through their music I was able to experience their humanity, tenacity and camaraderie – and feel the rhythm of the resilience of their lives. They afforded me a slice of life that I would not otherwise have encountered – as well as the sense of being and the understanding it has given to my life.

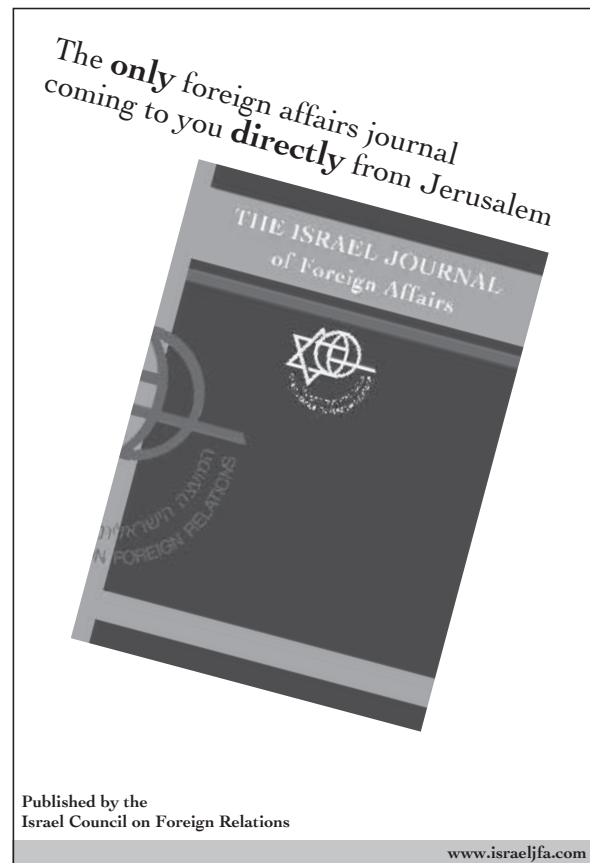
... They say what goes around comes around; and now after all these years, records which were known as 78s in those days, are back in fashion. They are of

great value and very much in demand - as are the old fashioned record- players (the machine - not me!)

Finally, as I look back, I hope that our long-gone rosewood record-player resides in a home alongside equally superb antiques – perhaps in another good Jewish home - and is appreciated as much as I remember it today - maybe even with the records.

NOTES

- 1 Lit. 'Health on your little head' ('well done')
- 2 'Good little boy'
- 3 'My little grandchild sings it better'
- 4 'Not much of a singer'
- 5 'My money down the drain'
- 6 'Once again terrible cards'



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ROUTES TO ROOTS

*

Rosalie Rogow

When Gwynne Robins called me to discuss a request she had received from Dr Ines Wagemann, the archivist in Griesheim, Germany, to trace Rosalie Wolff, she was thrilled to learn that her search had borne fruit. Indeed, I was the person in question, the granddaughter of Wilhelm and Zerline Wolff. The archivist's e-mail informed me that my paternal grandparents and an aunt who perished in Auschwitz had been chosen, as part of a high school project, to be honoured with the laying of *stolpersteine* in front of what had been their home in Griesheim. The ceremony would take place on the morning of 6 September 2016. *Stolpersteine* (lit. 'stumbling stones') are concrete cubes bearing brass plates that record the names and life dates of victims of Nazism. They are placed as memorials to the latter outside their last place of residency.

My first reaction was that I would not return to Germany. I had visited the country in 1972 with the intention of seeing the homes where my parents were raised. On that occasion, we encountered unrepentant, even aggressive attitudes and I had determined never to return. In the days after receiving the invitation I agonised over my decision, changing my mind several times before finally deciding that my attendance would primarily be about tracing my roots and honouring my grandparents and aunt, rather than about visiting Germany. My husband Stan accompanied me on what was to be an incredibly emotional rollercoaster journey, one I will never forget.

Having taken the decision to attend, I began an email correspondence with Dr Wagemann about various aspects of the ceremony. I also asked her to find out whether Burgbrohl, my mother's birthplace, would be laying *stolpersteine* in front of the home of my maternal grandparents, Moses and Setta Friesem (who perished in the gas chambers of Sobibor) and, if possible, this could be done more or less at the same time. Several days passed and I had all but given up on this enquiry when, just hours before we were to finalise our travel arrangements, I learned

Rosalie Rogow is a nursing sister and midwife living in Cape Town. She practised for many years in occupational health before it became recognised as a separate discipline.

that Niederzissen, the town neighbouring on Burgbrohl, was to celebrate the 175th anniversary of its synagogue on the weekend immediately preceding the week in which Griesheim was to honour my family. I was also informed that other members of the Friesem family had been invited to attend the function. This coincidence firmed my resolve to attend the two ceremonies.

The Niederzissen shul served also the needs of the Jewish community in Burgbrohl. It was destroyed on *Kristallnacht* (or "*Pogromnacht*" as the Germans call it). In 1939, the Jewish community was forced to sell the property, which in the 1990s served as a blacksmith's shop. In 2009 it was acquired by the municipality and refurbished. It opened its doors as a Jewish museum and cultural centre in 2012.



Rosalie and Stanley Rogow in front of the restored Niederzissen Shul.

We arrived at the hotel in Niederzissen that had been booked for us by the local community and found that other members of the family Friesem (my mother's maiden name) were already there, together with Richard Keuler (a former mayor) and Brunhilde Stürmer, who had done much of the organisation and research. They had arrived from Germany, Israel, Mexico, Holland and the UK. That evening a klezmer band performed in the shul and, believe it or not, we danced the hora!

On the Sunday morning we were taken to the local Jewish cemetery, which had been destroyed but lovingly restored by Frau

Stürmer, who had had the text of each of the headstones transcribed and the contents recorded in a book together with photographs. This endeavour inevitably met with opposition initially since local industry wished to use the land for development. We traversed a gravel path lined with mulberry trees, leading to a cemetery of almost ethereal beauty in a clearing in the forest surrounded by stately fir and walnut trees. In that tranquil setting, I found the tombstone of my great-great-grandfather (1765-1846), the patriarch of the Friesem family. We were accompanied by a Methodist minister, who not only had spent time in Israel but also spoke and read *Ivrit*. It was he who produced a *siddur* out of his pocket for us to say *Kaddish*. It was an emotionally charged experience as we recited *Kaddish* and sang *Hatikvah* in the company of the ancient, velvety moss-covered stones and the verdant surrounds through which occasional shafts of sunlight played across the graves. This calm and safe space bears no trace of the violence that it experienced at the hands of the Nazis but provides instead a comforting sense of continuity.

The celebration of the 175th anniversary of the Jewish community took place that Sunday afternoon, 4 September. Speakers at the well-attended ceremony included a rabbi and several local and regional dignitaries. The speeches were, of course, in German so most of what was said was lost on us. Professor Asher Friesem, my cousin (several times removed) from Israel, did, however, speak in English and very eloquently summarised our own feelings and hesitation in coming to Germany. The formal event was followed by an afternoon tea in a specially erected marquee. We were assured that although the lavish spread was not kosher, there was no pork. At the buffet, we sat next to a gentleman who has translated the works of Shalom Aleichem into German. The Niederzissen community truly overwhelmed us with their hospitality and warmth and did not shrink from admitting the evil that had seen the Jewish community obliterated.

The following day, we travelled the few kilometres to the neighbouring picture postcard town of Burgbrohl, where my mother grew up with her family. A guide led us through the village, first to a WWI war memorial. Amongst those honoured was the great uncle of my Israeli cousin. From there we went to Brohital Strasse, where we found the house in which my maternal grandparents lived with my mother and two aunts. The ground floor now houses "Toni's Steinoffen Pizza", which is closed on Mondays. I subsequently mailed a letter to the pizzeria, introducing myself and informing them of the history of the house. (We had

previously visited the house in 1972, but when I informed the occupant that my grandparents had once lived there, she responded curtly, "We paid for the house", and slammed the door). Eleven Jewish families had once lived just in Brohital Strasse. Sadly, this idyllic town opposed the laying of *stolpersteine* and there is no acknowledgement of the Jewish community that once lived there. The beauty of the town did nothing to allay the sense of sadness and loss of a once vibrant and thriving Jewish presence. In this village, Hitler would seem to have succeeded in his goal of creating a *Judenrein* area.

From Burgbrohl, we drove the 150 kilometres to Griesheim (near Darmstadt), the birth place of my father and where we had a very different experience. Those whom we met were positively eager to meet with us and talk about the past, almost as though we were empowered to offer absolution for the sins of their forefathers. That evening we were hosted by five young Christian women, all of whom belong to an organisation "March of Life" (<http://www.marchoflife.org>) which has held marches in some 300 towns all over Europe protesting against antisemitism and promoting Israel. This organisation has been honoured in the Knesset for its work. Some of them were visibly distressed at their discoveries that their parents and grandparents were active Nazis. I had not expected to encounter such frankness and intense emotions. Several of them had spent time in Israel. I was truly humbled by their obvious sincerity and pain.

At 11:30 on Tuesday, we assembled in front of the former residence of the family Mayer, the first house at which *stolpersteine* ("stumbling stones") were to be laid. The project in Griesheim had been motivated by a teacher at the Gerhart-Hauptmann-Schule (described as a school without racism and of courage) and the pupils had researched the history of each of the families to be honoured that day. We were provided in advance with an English translation of the histories to be read by the pupils in front of each of the homes. It was from the history of my grandparents that we learnt for the first time that the splendid building just across the road from the Mayer's residence had been built and owned by my grandparents who let out rooms in it. They had been compelled by antisemitic legislation to declare bankruptcy in 1938 and sell it for a fraction of its true worth. At least they were able to save themselves by fleeing to South Africa and joining my father and two of his sisters who were also able to leave Germany in time.

The artist and innovator of the *stolpersteine* project, Gunther Demnig, arrived punctually

and with a surgeon's precision removed the existing cobblestone, hollowed out the cavity to the correct depth, inserted and cemented the *stolpersteine* into the pavement. Each brass plaque was inscribed with the name of one of the former Jewish residents, not only those that perished in the Holocaust. Demnig works quietly and efficiently, without any form of communication. It would seem that the enormity of the project has taken over his life, possibly to a degree that he never expected when embarking on it.

From the family Mayer's home, we move to a second house, also on Wilhelm-Leuschner Strasse, and repeated the procedure. In front of each home, in addition to the recital of the family history, a young girl from the school played a violin piece. From there we crossed the main street and made our way to 21 Pfunstädter Strasse, the home of my paternal grandparents. Unlike the pavement on the town's main street, there were no cobblestones to remove on Pfunstädter Strasse and Herr Demnig carefully traced the shape of the 5 brass plaques with a red crayon onto the surface. He was about to cut into the pavement along the first of the redlines with an angle grinder, when a neighbour, Lena Müller, came running out and informed us that the street numbering had been changed some time after the war and that was number 21, was, in fact now, number 23. The crowd of about 50 to 60 people all moved to the front of what is now Vasili's Hairdressing Salon. The museum curator, Heike Jakowski, did Vasili the courtesy of explaining what was to happen and asking if he had any opposition to the laying of the *stolpersteine*. Fortunately, he had no objection and in a subsequent discussion with him, even acceded to my request that he take care of the brass plaques in my absence.

Just before Gunther commenced work with the angle grinder, in an attempt to humanise the procedure, I placed a photo of my aunt Minna who was murdered in Auschwitz in 1943 on the *stolperstein*. He brushed the photo to one side even though it was not in any way hindering his work. Having cut and hollowed the hole to accommodate the



five *stolpersteine*, the brass plaques were quickly inserted and cemented into place. The museum curator spoke and then the local mayor, Brigitte Winter, delivered an address in English. My brother, Lionel (who together with his partner, Wendy), had met us in Griesheim and my husband recited *Kaddish*.

While we had been following the procession from house to house, I had been scribbling notes in the A5 wire-bound notebook that I carried with me throughout this journey. In a spur of the moment decision and without too much thought, I decided to speak using my notes as a guide and express the sense of pain and loss that I have borne throughout my life. Although I do not like speaking in public, I was motivated by the thought that I owed it to my family and those families which were not represented. My speech concluded with an expression of thanks to those involved in recognising the pain of the Holocaust and in the hope that future generations would learn to live in love, tolerance and respect for others. I was extremely emotional and Stan tells me that he saw that a few people were moved to tears. Several of the bystanders came up afterwards and hugged me.

The ceremony was followed by a lunch in the Griesheim Museum, which is located in what was the Kaufhaus Wolf Loeb. The name struck a chord with me and then I remembered that my mother had worked in that very store. On her resignation in October 1936, just days before their departure for South Africa on board the *Stuttgart*, she had received a glowing reference from the owner. By a stroke of good fortune, I had brought the testimonial with me and decided to donate it to the Museum for their records.

Before commencing on this journey, I had wondered if the procedure would be meaningful and whether my presence would add any value to the ceremony. With the advantage of hindsight, I am so very pleased to have decided to attend. There was an air of solemnity about the proceedings. The readings by the pupils and the young girl on her violin playing Bach's Air all contributed to a very moving experience. Of particular significance was the fact that one of the readings was by a young Moslem girl and also one of the pupils read the poem, "The Butterfly" written by Pavel Friedman in Theresienstadt.

As we drove out of Griesheim on our way to Frankfurt, we detoured past my grandparents' home and I laid some roses on the brass plaques. Just before I did so, I saw a passer-by stop to read the inscriptions. I can but hope that the *stolpersteine* will tell the story to future generations and pave a way to a more loving and peaceful society.

Chicago

*

Bernard Levinson

Snow is falling. I can smell the snow. There is always snow in my memories. My soul is layered with the cold winters of Chicago. I don't know for sure if snow was actually falling on that day when my school announced the yearly 'school concert'. Each class would do their magical thing. My class were going to sing. We would be sailors on a ship on Lake Michigan. We would form up on the stage in such a way to actually appear like a ship. Heading for the audience. As a child, I could hold a note and could actually sing. I was placed at the prow. We sang about Chicago. Our young voices filled the entire school hall. We sang until the words and the music embedded itself into our brain's core. Now some eighty years later, I can still remember the words. I can still sing it.

Behold she stands
besides her inland sea.
With outstretched arms
to welcome you and me.
For every art,
for brotherhood she stands,
love in her heart
and bounty in her hands –
Chicago!

I wasn't sure what 'bounty' meant. My brother told me. Once a week he stood in an endless queue to accept the family issue of peanut butter, issued by the government, as part of the national relief plan. This was our staple diet. Cheap white bread and peanut butter.

Chicago was Kedzie Avenue. In the hot summer months, men worked in vests. I sold newspapers on the corner of Kedzie Avenue and Lawrence Avenue wearing my brother's vest. This was my newspaper stand. This was my Chicago. I remember playing with friends. We heard gun shots. We ran down the alley, in the direction of the noise. There in the middle of the alley, surrounded by a crowd, was John Dillinger, shot by the

police as he left a theatre. I tried to get close. In front of me people were dipping their handkerchiefs in his blood. A national hero had died.

We had many heroes. Baseball players. Movie screen idols and John Dillinger. Any one of us could recite the names of all the notorious most wanted men. They were our serious heroes. They didn't have to work...

My father did odd jobs on a hoist checking pipes on building sites. A tedious job in summer. A disastrous job in winter. He was lucky to have this work. My brother worked on a road digging team. My mother was the only real consistent wage earner. She was a kind-of seamstress. She sewed button holes for the few tailors who still had work. At home she practiced a unique wizardry. Articles of clothing metamorphosed into amazing creations that each of us in turn would wear...

My brother was ten years older than I. An adult. Converting his shirts was relatively easy. She shortened the sleeves and did a series of tucks and folds at the back of the shirt until the front of the shirt fitted. I was the youngest hunch-back in Chicago. Trousers were a serious problem. It was easy to shorten them, but the waist and the crutch posed formidable problems. She never really resolved them. In spite of her inspired genius with needle and thread, the transformation of trousers defeated her. I wore them folded a number of times at the back and hoisted up to the nipples in front.

Facing the audience on the stage I could have looked like an ordinary wild unkempt dishevelled midget of a child. As long as I didn't turn sideways.

Then the teacher had an idea. We would wear sailor suits. Looking back, I imagine most parents saw this as a need to buy white pants, get a white shirt and find a sailor hat. Any five and ten cents store had sailor hats... My mother announced there was no need to buy anything. She would make me a sailor suit. My mother had never seen a sailor. She was Russian. As a Russian she had never seen a Russian sailor either.

I remember our first dress rehearsal. My teacher looked at me long and hard.

I stood, arms at my side, waiting.
"My mother made it," I offered.

Bernard Levinson is a distinguished South African poet whose work has appeared in numerous scholarly publications and anthologies, including Jewish Affairs. Professionally, he is a psychiatrist based in Johannesburg.

He nodded.

Silence.

I could see that the collar of his shirt had been turned inside out. A manoeuvre my mother was particularly good at. His shirt cuffs were badly in need of repair. He had his lunch in a brown paper packet. It smelt of peanut butter.... I also knew he was Jewish.

"You know," he said. "I've been thinking. The most important part of a ship is the rudder. It steers the ship. Without it the ship would be lost. I want you to be the rudder."

There are two parts to every story. The

outside part and the inside part. Like fruit, the outside part could be interesting, even instructive. A world of its own. The inside part is the seed.

What is the seed of this story?

A peanut butter generation of small hungry boys singing their hearts out on a bleak school stage?

Or it could be about a young teacher, struggling in the American depression, who went home at the end of another sad working day, and told his wife about the 'Russian sailor suit' and they held each other and cried.

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THE RELATIVELY PUBLIC LIFE OF JULES BROWDE

*

Marcia Leveson

Jules Browde was unique, an irreplaceable asset to our society. Besides his formidable reputation as a lawyer – particularly as a fierce defender of human rights – he had an enormous vitality, empathy and curiosity about life. He related to everyone he met, living life to the full. He was also a great raconteur. However, if you expected this biography, written by his grandson, Daniel, to be simply a transcript of those anecdotes with which Jules regaled his listeners – hair-raising and hilarious stories of his exploits in the army and in appearances in court – you will find something different. A much more complex and fuller picture emerges. For those who wish to remember Jules in all his vividness, or want to get to know him better – the essence of the man, his spirit, his background, family, early life, army experience, legal work and interactions with his wife, Selma, his children and grandchildren – this remarkable work, enhanced with many photographs, brings him intensely to life in a way that the anecdotes alone could never do.

The first chapter is intriguing and atmospheric. In the dark, the young Daniel meets an enigmatic figure whose questions prompt him to confront the task that he has set himself – to write a memoir of what he calls the ‘relatively public life’ of his grandfather. Immediately a double level opens up – we see ‘the young storyteller’ grappling to explain and celebrate his grandfather, while at the same time observing and recording himself and acknowledging the challenge he had undertaken. This sets the scene for the way the book unfolds – it is an unusual and

arresting process.

At first the enterprise took the form of recording and transcribing Jules’s own anecdotes – and some Daniel wrote up from memory after interviewing his grandfather (affectionately called ‘Bronco’). But as he goes along, he also sets down the loving interactions they had, as well as his impressions formed through memories of family gatherings and individual conversations – placing Jules in his habitual surroundings and capturing Jules’s turn of phrase and his thoughts and emotions as he remembers and discusses his past.

It is a complex narrative with many strands. Besides the anecdotes there are the stories Jules tells of his life, his father, mother and siblings. Daniel has researched the lives of the ancestors, and records Jules’s interactions with his family, friends and his many colleagues. Because the project took so long, over a span of ten years, he had the time to preserve many snippets of conversation and observation in telling detail and with a novelistic eye. This gives it the ‘felt life’ texture that could not have happened in any other way.

We have, for example, Jules’s habitual greeting to Daniel – ‘Hello laddie’; his place at the kitchen table with the ‘skeleton of a crossword, half filled in’; his favorite chair in the corner of the lounge where he often sat and read and where much of the recording was done; immediate evocations of Jules’s study, of family outings, family games of chess, visits to Jules’s early haunts in Page Street, Yeoville (‘I used to play soccer in this garden almost ninety years ago,’ my grandfather said, with a smile that rippled across his lips and disappeared); and to the cemeteries where his parents and siblings lie. Cumulatively we see Jules from many angles over and above what he himself presents. And so, for me, the book has a richness and a depth which is quite masterly.

I am touched by the following passage:

Dr Marcia Leveson, a long-serving member of the editorial board of Jewish Affairs, is a former Professor in the English Department at the University of the Witwatersrand. She has written extensively in the area of South African fiction and edited a number of anthologies of fiction and poetry.

One morning I asked him why he thought his career had taken this particular direction....

'That's a good question,' he said, and took a moment to ponder it. For the first time he told he would come back to me. A week later he handed me two pieces of foolscap paper, with his handwriting on both sides of each... he had listed three people whom he called 'ethical inspiration': 1) His father, who taught him by his own example 'to treat people fairly and decently, irrespective of the colour of their skin'; 2) Colin Gluckman, later Colin Gillon, one of the early leaders of the Habonim youth movement in South Africa, who had introduced him at a very early age to Jewish thought and ethics; and 3) Selma, my grandmother...

'Caring for others... has occupied most of her days, indeed even the hours when some might have expected her to be asleep. It is her example of service to others that was directly responsible for most of the worthwhile activities in which I became involved during the course of my career as an advocate'.

Another passage is equally revealing:

In the last few law sessions his stories took on new shapes. He told me the story of how he and some of his colleagues had formed the Bar's first non-racial group of advocates, and how the members of this group had chosen to stay in Pritchard Street when all the other major legal groups moved north to Sandton. He told me how in 1998 Nelson Mandela, then the country's president, asked him to lead a commission of inquiry into the administration of South African rugby. He recounted the story of the scaled down Truth and Reconciliation Commission he chaired at the Wits Medical School the following year.

And we have the intertwined stories that both Jules and Selma told from their different perspectives of how they met fell in love

and married. Truly a loving, supportive and achieving couple.

Jules's long life was very much connected to Johannesburg, and in recording it Daniel has also provided a record spanning the history of the place where he was so prominent a figure. Of a visit to the house and suburb where Jules grew up, he writes:

I thought about how I was being shown around these streets by someone who knew them before they were even tarred. It was a heavy pride I felt then, a melancholic pride. Some lives are lived in many places, most are lived in just one. His had been lived here, in this mining town. This was where he was born, grew up, went to school. His parents are both buried here. It is where he earned his keep and raised his family. It was some relief to think that whatever I wrote or didn't write, history was already stamped into the stubborn material of the city.

To produce such an engaging and nuanced work was no simple task and Daniel had to prepare himself long and hard. He acknowledges all the support he had along the way including that from his family and his girlfriend, later his wife, Thenji. He has achieved an approach and a style that is easy and intimate - the perfect vehicle for what is in fact a very personal portrait of Jules, both in his public and his private persona. For me, Daniel's choice to record the writing process in such detail was the right one. The laying bare of the record of his own coming to maturity both as man and writer provides a further dimension which intertwines with the portrait of Jules and enriches it. That is in itself an intricate and painstaking feat.

Jules Browde died at 97, a few weeks before the book went to print. I can only applaud what Daniel has accomplished and I predict that this memoir will be recognised as a splendid tribute and a major biographical feat.

The Relatively Public Life of Jules Browde by Daniel Browde, Jonathan Ball Publishers: Johannesburg & Cape Town, 2016.

OUR LITVAK AND SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH INHERITANCE

*

Ralph Zulman

David Sandler spent most of his childhood (1954-1969) in the South African Jewish Orphanage (Arcadia), and now lives in Perth, Australia. With these two volumes, he has compiled an extensive documentary history of Lithuanian Jewry and those who settled in South Africa. During the period 1881-1914, close on three million Jews migrated from Eastern Europe to overseas countries. The vast majority went to North America. The newcomers to South Africa hailed from different parts of Russia, Poland and even Rumania, but the majority came from what was later to become the independent republic of Lithuania. They were all collectively referred to as '*Litvaks*', and the South African Jewish community was often described as a 'colony of Lithuania'. The country was second only to North America as a land of destination for Lithuanian Jews.

The two volumes run to some 833 pages in total and are illustrated by copious appropriate photographs. Volume One, *Our Litvak Inheritance*, is divided into two parts. The first consists of five sections, namely, 'Our Jewish History'; 'World War One and its aftermath'; 'Life in the *Shtetl*'; 'World War II and the Holocaust' and 'Lithuania Revisited'. Part Two has one section - Immigration - that includes the booklet *From Eastern Europe to South Africa, Memories of an Epic Journey* by Gwynne Schrire.

Volume Two, *Our South African Jewish Inheritance*, consists of a Foreword, Acknowledgements and Thanks and some fourteen sections, namely, 'The Early History of South Africa (In the Western and Eastern Cape)'; 'Kimberley and the Discovery Diamonds (Northern Cape)'; 'The Establishment of Natal, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal Boer Republics'; 'The discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand and the founding of Johannesburg'; 'The Anglo Boer War (1899-1902)'; 'Immigration, Yiddish, Zionism and Jewish culture'; 'World War One'; 'The generosity of the SA Jewish

Community'; '*Landmanschaten* - Mutual Aid Societies'; 'World War Two'; 'Jewish life in Country Communities'; 'Jewish Communities and Personalities'; 'Support for Israel during the Israeli War of Independence (1948-1949)' and 'The Struggle from Apartheid to Multiracial elections'.

The history of South Africa is initially documented from a general point of view and then the Jewish contribution follows.

As Sandler points out in the foreword to the first volume, the compilation is not a single narrative. Rather, "It is the gathering of articles, stories and histories that describe life and history in Lithuania, immigrating to South Africa and early life and history in South Africa from about 1880 to 1990". The general history is intertwined with personal histories and recollections and includes some which Sandler has collected during his own family research.

Sources of volume Two include The Keidan Yizkor Book, Worlds Apart – The Remigration of South African Jews by Colin Tatz, The Pretoria Jewish Community, South Africa's 800 - The Story of South African Volunteers in Israel's War of Birth by Henry Katzew, Boerejode – Jews in the Boer Armed Forces, 1899-1902 by David Saks, Birth of a Community by Rabbi Dr Gerald Mazabow, The Fordsburg-Mayfair Hebrew Congregation, The Jews in South Africa by Gus Saron and Louis Hotz (eds), The Nationwide Survey of the South African Jewish Community by Arthur Markowitz, The War Report and The Vision Amazing: The Story of South Africa Zionism by Marcia Gitlin.

The two volumes contain a wealth of detailed and interesting information, including the following lists/indexes: *Boerejode* - the Jews who fought with the Boers during the Anglo-Boer War, South African Jews who fell in World War One, Johannesburg, Country Bloemfontein and Durban 1924 Subscribers to the South African Jewish Orphanage (over 6000 names and addresses), South African *Machalniks* (South African volunteers who served during the War of Independence 1948-1949 - over 800 names), South Africans on Frontline Kibbutzim 1948-1949, South African *Nachal* (South African volunteers who served in the Israeli armed forces during

Mr Justice Ralph Zulman, a long-serving member of the editorial board of Jewish Affairs and a frequent contributor to its Reviews pages, is a former Judge of the Appeal Court of South Africa.

1956 to 1972) and South African Fallen in the Defence of Israel.

The compilations should prove a very useful reference source for anyone interested in the *Litvak* story, the Jewish history of Lithuania and South Africa. All proceeds from the sale of the compilations, as well as from Sandler's previous compilations (including on the Arcadia and Oranjia Jewish orphanages in South Africa, the Ochberg Orphans and

the Pinsker Orphans) will be donated to Arcadia and Oranjia, and to the JDC.

Our Litvak Inheritance and *Our South African Jewish Inheritance* (two volumes), compiled by David Solly Sandler, 2016. Copies, as well as of previous books compiled and edited by D S Sandler, can be obtained from the author at sedsand@inet.net.au.

NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE TO THE NAZIS

*

David Saks

In November 1938, shortly after the Kristallnacht pogrom, the Indian nationalist leader Mohandas K Gandhi controversially advised German Jews to respond to their persecution by engaging in dignified passive resistance, assuring them that whatever suffering they might endure, they would gain an enduring moral victory over their tormentors. This is encapsulated in the following extract from an article he wrote for his journal *Harijan*:

Can the Jews resist this organised and shameless persecution? Is there a way to preserve their self-respect and not to feel helpless or forlorn? I submit that there is. ... If were a Jew and were born in Germany and earned my livelihood there, I would claim Germany as my home even as the tallest gentile German might, and challenge him to shoot me or cast me in the dungeon; I would refuse to be expelled or to submit to discriminating treatment. And for doing this I should not wait for the Jews to join me in civil resistance, but would have confidence that in the end the rest were bound to follow my example. If one Jew or all the Jews were to accept the prescription here offered, he or they cannot be worse off than now. And suffering voluntarily undergone will bring them an inner strength and joy which no number of resolutions of sympathy passed in the world outside Germany can.

David Saks is Associate Director of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and Editor of Jewish Affairs.

Gandhi has been strenuously criticised for being, at best, naïve, and at worst blind to the point of callousness to the true depths of Nazi depravity. Amongst those Jewish advocates of nonviolent resistance who reluctantly broke with him over his stance were the philosopher Martin Buber and Rabbi Yehuda Magnes. Gandhi's critics accuse him of failing to distinguish between the relatively benign British administration in India or even the much harsher but still comparatively restrained white-dominated government in South Africa and a regime that in word and deed defied the most basic norms of civilized, humane conduct. Passive resistance might be effective with those whose consciences might see them eventually balk at continually repressing people who consistently responded to violence with peaceful non-cooperation. How could it in any way prevail, however, against those whose core ideology ran diametrically counter to notions of conscience as broadly understood, if often imperfectly practiced, by the civilized world? In view of all this, it appeared that only force would in the final analysis be effective when it came to ridding the world of so evil a phenomenon as Nazism.

The fall of the Third Reich was indeed brought about in the end by the greatly superior military resources that its opponents were able to bring against it. Even so, there was a fair amount of nonviolent opposition against Nazism, beginning in pre-war Germany and spreading to the various countries that were occupied by Germany during the war itself. In his book *Nonviolent Resistance to the Nazis*, George Paxton chronicles the various forms which this opposition took and

attempts to assess both the degree to which it can be said to have been effective and whether it could, or indeed should, have been practiced to a greater extent than was in fact the case. The author's own particular interest in the philosophy and strategy of nonviolent resistance is indicated by his previous work as editor of *The Gandhi Way*, the quarterly journal of the UK-based Gandhi Foundation, and in his book *Sonja Schlesin – Gandhi's South African Secretary* (Glasgow, 2006). Schlesin's life, and particularly her role in the Indian Passive Resistance movement in early 20th Century South Africa, is the subject of Harriet Feinman's insightful monograph, which appears elsewhere in this issue of *Jewish Affairs*.

The Nazi era, Paxton writes, "revealed the very worst aspects of human nature", yet the extreme challenges it posed also brought out the best in many people, generally only at the individual level, but sometimes at the collective level as well. The rescue of Danish Jewry would be an obvious example of the latter. Aside from the many thousands of ordinary people who, at great personal risk, gave sanctuary to Jews or aided in their escape to neutral countries, there were those who found ways to defy the Nazi occupiers and the collaborationist regimes that functioned on their behalf. This might take only symbolic forms, such as listening to prohibited radio broadcasts or wearing symbols of resistance, or it might entail more concrete acts of defiance, including refusing to work in weapons' factories, register for work in Germany or carry out Nazi orders. As Paxton stresses, total obedience to the occupying power was never inevitable; some form of resistance was always an option. Such acts of resistance did indeed occur throughout Nazi-occupied Europe but, as Paxton concludes, "they needed to be done by more people, with more coordination".

The question arises as to what might have been the result had nonviolent resistance, rather than occurring piece-meal and primarily underground, had taken the Gandhian approach of coordinated scale non-cooperation organised on a mass scale and in the open. In view of the savage reprisals carried out by the Germans in response to acts of armed resistance – the wholesale massacres following the assassination of *SS-Obergruppenführer* Reynhard Heydrich, for example – this may have been the only realistic way in which the various captive populations could have posed an effective challenge to Nazi tyranny. Paxton fully recognises that even in countries where it was most employed, such as in Norway and Denmark, nonviolent resistance was

not enough to expel the invader. However, he maintains that "had it been used more even more widely and systematically", a great deal more would have been achieved, since an occupying force, in order to function, "must have a substantial level of cooperation from the occupied population". The reality is that throughout the war, such cooperation was largely forthcoming, whether out of opportunism or simply fear of what the consequences of disobedience might be.

Paxton also boldly wrestles with the sensitive question of whether the Holocaust might have been averted had German Jews responded at an early stage of their persecution with nonviolent resistance. As is universally recognised, the Holocaust did not – indeed could not – begin with mass shootings and gas chambers. Rather, the path to genocide commenced with non-lethal acts of discrimination that progressively stripped Jews of their citizenship rights but fell short of actual physical harassment. Once the pariah status of Jews had been legally established, it became possible to move on to more direct acts of oppression – arbitrary arrests, round-ups, deportations, seizures of property and, successively, ghettoization, forced labour and finally physical extermination. Observes Paxton, "The Nazis cleverly reduced the impact of restrictions by going through many stages which the Jews could persuade themselves would be the last". What might have happened, however, had German Jews at the outset refused to comply with compulsory registration, declined to wear the Yellow Star, resisted serving under Jewish Councils under German control or working as slave laborers? In the face of mass disobedience at an early stage of their rule, how would the Nazi authorities have reacted? One also must take into account how principled Jewish defiance may have emboldened anti-Nazi factions within the broader German population to themselves defy antisemitic laws, such as those banning Jews from the professions. It has often been argued that had France and Britain acted decisively against early breaches by Germany of the Versailles Treaty, particularly the remilitarization of the Rhineland, Hitler might have been stopped in his tracks. Similarly, and obviously with the benefit of hindsight, had German Jewry from the outset responded to discriminatory measures with principled, across-the-board non-cooperation, perhaps the eventual catastrophe that engulfed them and their brethren throughout the continent could yet have been prevented.

Nonviolent Resistance to the Nazis by George Paxton, YouCaxton Publications, 2016, 244pp.

new POETRY

Such a question....

And God said
"Adam **knew** Eve."
One cryptic
apocalyptic
word.
A sanction for loving?
To lose oneself
in a glorious moment
of ecstasy.
Would the world
Have changed
if God had said
"Now Adam
understands
Eve....?"

Bernard Levinson

Night Flight

And in the night
My fears take flight
And I lie
With guilt and doubt

But in the day
These fears allay
And somehow
I shut them out

But in the night
I shake with fright
Waves of sickness
Wash over me

But in the day
I go my way
And think:
'What will be, will be'

But in the night,
I lose my fight
And don't know
Wrong from right

Yet in the dawn
With nerves shattered and torn
I look to
The morning light

Charlotte Cohen

The Eternal Quest of My People

I come and go, I search and search,
The voices of our fathers, I no longer hear.
Silent cries haunt me
My eyes dart and search and search
The only remains are the souls of my people.

On the Street of the Jewish Martyrs
Weep bitter tears flow non-stop
From the old fountain still upstanding.

I take a walk in the old Street of the Tailors
The sewing machines no longer sing.
The seamstresses prick their fingers no more.
Those who sewed shrouds had none.
Smoke took them on far-away skies.

A puzzled couple asks:
"Did the children of Shadday lived here?
How many remain in Rhodes?"
I look at the deep blue sky and reach for
the perfume of roses,
I smell ashes and grey is the sky.

I push the doors of Kahal Shalom, I step in
Nobody prays, faces have no features,
Silence is audible, the temple is empty.
I murmur Kaddish, the forbidden pray

As I stand alone in the synagogue.

As I approach La Puerta di la Mar
I imagined all Jewish homes whitewashed,
Tables adorned and places well set:
Passover is about to start, but
The story of the enslaved Jews
Never was to be recalled.
Bombs erased it all.

At cock-crow, I get up, isolated.
I no longer hear the footsteps of the men
Rushing through the narrow streets
On their way to the seashores
In order to cast their sins into the sea
As the ten days of penitence approaches.

On the 23rd of July 1944
Anguish befell upon the Jews of the island.
The Germans took them away.
In one day, this ancient community was
no more.
Auschwitz-Birkenau, received my people.

They had reached the end of their journey.
This was on the 27th of the month of Av.

Isaac Habib

Mein Leben

Mein Leben is shoin a lange tzait
 Fil lebens-bilder zain varby
 A tsvaite Milchoma gedaint mit
 Shreklige Gesheinish!
 Tsu lernen fun die Shoa un Durg derkenen
 der veitiken fun Falorene Neshomas!
 Vie ken a yugentlech dos iber leben?
 Es vet stayn in unser hertzen bis-vanet
 Mir gain tsu Yenem Velt

Moe Skikne

*[My Life/My Life is now a long time/Many life images have flitted by/
 A second War in childhood days remembered/as shocking scary events!/
 To learn of the Shoa and acknowledge/the pain of lost Souls/How can
 adolescence survive that?/These will stay in our hearts until we/enter the
 World to Come].*

SHORT VISIT ON EARTH

*Someone reminded me,
 in the early hours of this morning
 that our stay on earth is only a stage in the journey of our
 soul*

*I woke up wondering why this message came to me
 today?
 I think it was to remind me that Death is not the dark black
 skeletal figure portrayed by so many artists*

*Rather, Death is an angel of Light sent down by the Ein
 Sof
 to help lift our souls onward and upwards
 to the shining light of the Shekhinah,
 so that She may send our soul to the next level
 suitable for our neshoma*

Abigail Sarah Bagraim

READERS' LETTERS

*

In Solly Berger's article on the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation (Rosh Hashanah, 2016) he mentions the Buitenkant Street shul. I would like to share what I found in the archives at UCT. The Beit Midrash Tikvat Yeshurun / Hope of Jeshurun, in 23 Buitenkant Street, was established in 1897 by Israel Joseph and Sarah Pearl Roytowski. Rev. A P Bender officiated at the consecration. Styled as a Beth Midrash, it was frequented by Litvak immigrants from Europe and also refugees from the Transvaal due to the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902 and held regular minyanim. About a decade later the membership dropped off, likely due to the attraction of other shuls in the area built in the early 1900s, such as the shuls in Roeland and Constitution Streets and the newly-built Gardens shul. Also, in 1909 the Constitution Street shul employed a Rabbi M. C. Mirvish, reputedly the first Rabbi with full Rabbinical ordination/smicha, to be appointed to a congregation in the Cape. Further, due to IJ Roytowski's illnesses, he could no longer assist in keeping the minyan going and so he arranged, in 1910, with the Chassidishe minyan – later known as the Hebrew Congregation Chabad or simply Chabad (sometimes spelled Chabaad), to use the shul for their minyanim. He passed away shortly afterwards 7 December 1911, 16 Kislev. The Buitenkant shul was sold to Chabad by the Roytowski family in 1927. In 1945, Chabad moved to 22 Virginia Avenue and sold the Buitenkant building. In 1953, it acquired 31 Arthur's Road to be their new shul, where today the original plaque from the Buitenkant street shul can still be seen in the foyer. Today, Chabad can be found in St John's Road and Arthur's Road shul now houses the Beit Midrash Morasha congregation.

Juan-Paul Burke
Cape Town

I refer to Ralph Zulman's letter in the Chanukah 2016 issue of Jewish Affairs. While commending him on his compilation of a list of Jews involved in the legal profession in South Africa, to complement that of Judge Dennis Davis (published in the Rosh Hashanah 2016 issue) - which Judge Davis acknowledges concentrated heavily on the Western Cape - I must point out that my late husband's name was given incorrectly. The correct spelling is Geoffrey Leveson.

Marcia Leveson
Johannesburg

While I was pleased to see my story 'Holocaust Shadows', I was surprised to see that in the Contents page, it was listed as 'Fiction'. This story is in fact based on my personal recollections of approximately sixty years ago, so I did fill in some gaps in my memory. However, I still have in my possession the original newspaper cutting that described the way that my mother's mother and sister died during the war - all true. The photo of the cutting is what is in my story. Most of the details are accurate, for example my father's shop, my mother's telling me about her town in Lithuania etc.

Also, the piece was identified as 'Holocaust Echoes' in the introduction to the Online "Dear Subscriber" section, but the title in the actual journal is listed as 'Holocaust Shadows', closer to the title I had given the story – 'Shadows of the Holocaust'.

Zita Nurok
USA



Chag Sameach

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promised land
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