

JEWISH AFFAIRS

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JEWISH AFFAIRS

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In publishing JEWISH AFFAIRS, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies aims to produce a cultural forum which caters for a wide variety of interests in the community. The journal will be a vehicle for the publication of articles of significant thought and opinion on contemporary Jewish issues, and will aim to encourage constructive debate, in the form of reasoned and researched essays, on all matters of Jewish and general interest.

JEWISH AFFAIRS aims also to publish essays of scholarly research on all subjects of Jewish interest, with special emphasis on aspects of South African Jewish life and thought. Scholarly research papers that make an original contribution to their chosen field of enquiry will be submitted to the normal processes of academic refereeing before being accepted for publication.

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The SA Jewish Board of Deputies is committed to dialogue and free enquiry. It aims to protect human rights and to strive for better relations among peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds in South Africa.

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JEWISH AFFAIRS

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Editor: David Saks

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JEWES AND THE FORMATION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY

*

Irwin Manoim

Do Jews control the newspapers? Type that question into Google and you will enter a netherworld of conspiracies in which the 'Jewish' media magnates Anton Rupert, Trevor Manuel, Harry Oppenheimer and Alec Erwin conspired with the CIA double agents FW de Klerk and Pik Botha to betray South Africa to the Zionist puppet master Joe Slovo.¹

Alternatively, you could buy a stack of South African newspapers published in Joburg and Cape Town and Durban and Port Elizabeth and flip through page after page in search of Jewish-sounding journalist names. If you concentrate really hard, and really long, you might find three or four or five. How many Jews edit major newspapers? None. The editor of *Business Day* goes by the name Cohen, but, fine chap that he is, he's not Jewish in any way that would convince a rabbi. You could check the share registers of the big media houses to find out who owns those newspapers. Any Jewish names? Not likely. Jews barely feature in the newspaper business today.

But even that answer would be misleading. Jews of one kind or another, some heroes, some villains, did indeed play an important and undervalued role in building up this country's newspaper industry. Many major institutions that don't look in the slightest bit Jewish today owe their roots to Jewish entrepreneurship and chutzpah. What I'd like to present here is the real history, largely forgotten, of the Jewish role in publishing newspapers.²

The word "media" covers newspapers, magazines, television, radio, satellite, websites, YouTube, blogs, Facebook and Twitter. Given that Jews have stuck their *schnozzes* into every one of these areas, I am obliged to narrow down my subject matter. So I will stick with the printed newspaper business and ignore the obvious facts that the Kirsh family are big in radio and consumer

magazines, that Johnny Copelyn has a firm hand on eTV and that Jane Raphaely pretty much invented modern women's magazines. Nor will I talk about South Africa's Jewish community press, a fascinating story, but an entirely separate world: very few Jews associated with the mainstream press worked with the community press.

Here's the basic theory. Jewish immigrants to this country in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, much like Jewish immigrants to the USA, were quick to spot opportunities in new and marginal and high risk enterprises, moved in quickly, dominated the market and then, having laid the groundwork, got bulldozed aside by more powerful interests. One good example of that was the newspaper business.

Let's take the case of the first Jew to run a newspaper in this country. Joseph Suasso da Lima was a Sephardic Jew with a Portuguese name who founded the first Afrikaans newspaper in this country. Even more remarkable, he did so at a time when printing newspapers was still illegal and dangerous.

The Dutch East India Company's officials, who controlled the Cape Colony for the first century and a half, were a particularly uptight and *verkrampde* breed. They banned Jews and Catholics from the colony. They banned not only newspapers but printing in any shape or form. And when the British took over, for the first thirty years they found it convenient to do as little as possible to change that.

Those Jews who set foot here did so by converting, or at least pretending to convert, which is what Da Lima did. He joined the Dutch Reformed Church a few weeks before he took the ship to South Africa in 1818, to take up a job teaching the Bible to the children of slaves. Why he chose to come to the Cape is a mystery. He was a high-brow in a low-brow town, a liberal with some sympathy for the slaves, wrote poetry and and his Christian peers refused to believe that his hurried conversion was in any way genuine. Da Lima was fired from his job, ridiculed in public and nicknamed *De Joodse Dwerge* (the Jewish Dwarf) because he was a hunchback. An early history of

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the Cape had this to say about him: "Mr J Suasso De Lima was a Dutch lawyer, a clever man, and a linguist. He was always in trouble, never paid anybody, especially his house rent." A more kindly reviewer, SA Rochlin, who compiled an overview of Jewish literature in South Africa, had this to say of him: "Powerful in intellect, eccentric in manners, courageous in defending his particular causes."³

In either 1826 or 1828, Da Lima founded a newspaper called *De Versamelaar*, written in a dialect called Cape Dutch. Many years later, Cape Dutch became known by a simpler name, Afrikaans. The paper pre-dated the formal lifting of press censorship, somehow slipping past the British at a time when English papers were still being banned.⁴ Da Lima is said to have published an even earlier paper called *The Cape Koerant*, but no copy has ever been found. *De Versamelaar* lasted 22 years, but Da Lima went bankrupt within two or three years and the paper passed into the hands of one of his most hated rivals. Years later, when a Jewish community was finally established, Da Lima, now an old man, gave money to it, but he was nonetheless buried in a Christian cemetery. So it can be said then that a Jew, or perhaps an ex-Jew, founded the Afrikaans press in this country.⁵

My next example was also a liberal and intellectual, also had an ambiguous relationship with the religion he was born into, and was also described by his enemies as "the Jewish Dwarf". Saul Solomon was born in 1817 on the island of St Helena to a wealthy merchant family who happened to own the local newspaper. At age five he was shipped off to the UK, where the Chief Rabbi personally circumcised him and put him in a Jewish boarding school, both of which experiences may have coloured his attitudes to his ancestral religion, and also to the British. He developed rheumatic fever, and the appalling medical practices of the time, which forced him to wear splints for years, permanently stunted his growth.

In 1831, his family immigrated to the Cape, where he trained as an engraver in one of the earliest print shops before taking over his employer's business and becoming a successful printer to the government. He launched the *Mercantile Advertiser*, the first example of a local knock-and-drop newspaper: it was delivered free to every home in Cape Town, a winning formula. Alas, too winning: lots of others copied Solomon's idea and drove him out of the market.

Solomon imported the first steam-driven press into Cape Town. It could print far more pages far more quickly than the old hand presses, making a genuinely mass media possible. The first to exploit this opportunity

was one Bryan Henry Darnell, who in 1857 started the *Cape Argus*, with Solomon as his printer. Six years on, Darnell ran into financial trouble and was forced to hand the paper over to Solomon.

Solomon had become a Member of Parliament, the Helen Suzman of his day, an often lonely liberal voice in favour of black rights, anti-British imperialism and pro-local self-government. The paper became a vehicle for his strong views. He also improved on the content by subscribing to the first foreign telegraph service. Thanks to the steam press, the *Cape Argus* could appear three times a week - its rivals appeared only once a week - and also print more copies, making it a huge success, the leading paper in the colony.

When it came to religion, Solomon played both ends against the middle: he attended church very publically along with his fellow MPs, but when the first rabbi was installed at the Cape he attended Pesach *seders* at his house and gave generously towards the building of the first synagogue.⁶

What finally broke Solomon was a *Cape Argus* expose of a massacre of Korana and San rebels by ill-disciplined government troops. The Prime Minister, Gordon Sprigg, retaliated by stopping all government advertising in the *Argus*, the major source of its revenue. Attorney General Thomas Upington sued Solomon, and the long-running court case left him penniless. Solomon sold out to his editor, one Francis Dormer, a liberal like himself.⁷ But unknown to Solomon, Dormer had a secret backer - a certain Cecil John Rhodes, not yet as famous as he would become, who shifted the paper in a pro-imperialist direction. Solomon left the Cape and died poor and forgotten in Scotland.⁸

We come now to Emanuel Mendelssohn, something of an anomaly in this story. Firstly, he was of normal height. Secondly, he was an actual practicing Jew; indeed he was founder, president and a major power in Johannesburg's first synagogue, the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation.⁹ A German Jew who had first immigrated to Australia, he arrived in Johannesburg within a year of the town's establishment and helped develop the area that is today Hillbrow, where Caroline Street is named after his wife, a famous soprano. He co-owned the Standard Building Company which built the Standard Theatre, the leading theatre in early Johannesburg, in which his wife played a prominent role. He also owned the *Standard and Diggers News*, a morning daily that is entirely forgotten today, but was once the most powerful English newspaper in the Transvaal.¹⁰

Mendelssohn was a divisive figure, not

only among the Johannesburg Jews (he was right in the middle of the various religious feuds that split the early community) but also in society at large. In a city of 'uitlanders' hostile to the Boer government, Mendelssohn was an ardent supporter of President Paul Kruger, an outspoken critic of the mining capitalists, and a populist voice on behalf of the "small man" – the diggers, prospectors and shop keepers. He called for heavier taxes on mining profits to reduce the tariffs on everyday goods. He described mining capital as the "chief enemy" of the country's independence. He was not entirely uncritical of Kruger, urging him to make concessions to the *uitlanders* and criticising the state's increasingly heavy-handed restrictions on the press, which included a three month ban on his main rival, the pro-British afternoon paper, *The Star*, controlled by Rhodes.

In return for his loyalty, Kruger granted Mendelssohn generous government printing contracts and advertising notices; indeed the paper styled itself "The Authorised Government Gazette for the Witwatersrand". Mendelssohn won himself the sole right to pipe fresh water to drought-stricken Johannesburg, a huge contract which he later sold to Barney Barnato at a handsome profit. Kruger also gave Mendelssohn the concession to supply sanitation to the city. This ran into fierce opposition from the town council and Mendelssohn's many enemies, and Kruger was forced to cancel it.

Mendelssohn also used his newspaper to squeeze both friends and foes for payments. Those who regularly advertised their prospectuses, notices to shareholders and company reports and who also paid him discreet under-the-table cash subsidies received flattering press coverage. What made this particularly useful to those seeking investment was that in 1895 Mendelssohn established a London edition of the paper.¹¹ Those who refused to play along with him, for example Barnato, who fell out with Mendelssohn over the water deal, and the Standard Bank, which refused to lend him money to build a bigger plant for the *Standard and Digger's News*, were subject to vicious attacks. But this tactic eventually backfired on Mendelssohn – his most dangerous foes, the powerful German-Jewish firm of Wernher Beit, retaliated in early 1899 by starting their own newspaper, the ardently pro-imperialist *Transvaal Leader*, which quickly captured half the *Standard and Diggers News* circulation. But for a while, both the major morning newspapers in Johannesburg were controlled by rival Jewish interests.

Then war came to Mendelssohn's rescue. When the Anglo-Boer War broke out in October 1899, Kruger banned the pro-British

newspapers. That left *The Standard and Diggers News* in the marvellous position of holding a monopoly on all news in the middle of a rather newsworthy war. Sadly, this lasted only eight months, as the British captured Johannesburg in May 1900 and lost no time shutting the paper down. The military confiscated the printing plant and used it to produce their own newspaper, the *Johannesburg Gazette*, as well as all their stationery and notices. They imprisoned Mendelssohn, eventually deporting him to England for the duration of the war. The military played rough with the equipment, damaging both the building and the printing plant. Mendelssohn spent years campaigning for the payment of £20 000 which he felt he was owed, but never received a cent.

Another fortune hunter, even closer to Kruger than Mendelssohn and even more prone to winning and losing fortunes and entangling himself in corrupt relationships, was Alois Hugo Nellmapius, a Hungarian immigrant. Nellmapius is often described as Jewish, and indeed had a Jewish father from whom he inherited a decidedly Jewish appearance. But he was brought up a Christian and married in the Anglican Cathedral in Durban. Nellmapius, who arrived in the Transvaal in 1873, long before most other "Uitlanders", figures here for reasons other than his religion. He built the first railroads for Kruger, the first factories (dynamite and steel) and founded Irene, home to an experimental farm, where he produced a dubious but explosive brandy from mielies. He also launched two newspapers - not with any great enthusiasm, but at the president's insistence.

In 1889, Nellmapius was instructed by Kruger to launch a rival to the republic's leading newspaper, *Land En Volk*, which had infuriated the president by favouring his rival, General Piet Joubert. At Kruger's suggestion, it would appear weekly in Dutch, and be called *Die Pers*, and twice weekly in English, named *The Press*. Nellmapius was obliged to buy premises and set up a printing plant, at his own expense, but hoped to win favours in return. The editor of the English version was one B Gluckstein, previously editor of *The Bulletin*, an early Johannesburg paper. Two years later, Gluckstein fell out with Nellmapius, and retaliated with a bitter attack in *Land En Volk*, describing how he was fed false and deceiving information by Kruger and his senior officials, whom he labelled a corrupt "concessionaire-clique".¹² Gluckstein's name inclines one to imagine that he was Jewish. But what makes this puzzling, is that he repeatedly attacked his successor as a Jew. "A Jewish lithographer from Port Elizabeth, Weinthal, was put in

my place”, he wrote, and “as to be expected, the Jewish lithographer is no more than a stooge;” and “the Jew, Weinthal, is also correspondent for the *Diggers News* in Johannesburg, a paper that gives false and lying information against General Joubert.”¹³

Leo Weinthal, who is the main reason for this diversion, was a German Jew, born in 1865. Arriving in Port Elizabeth, he worked as photographer, then moved to Kruger’s republic in 1887 as a state lithographer, before quitting and becoming an accomplished



Joseph Suasso da Lima, pioneer of the Afrikaans language press



Parliamentarian and Cape press founder Saul Solomon



Standard & Diggers' News owner Emanuel Mendelssohn



Leo Weinthal, editor, journalist and founder of the Pretoria News.



I W Schlesinger, cinema, radio and newspaper mogul

local correspondent for Reuters, the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*. Appointed editor of *The Press* in 1891, he faithfully supported the Kruger government until the unexpected early death of Nellmapius, aged only 46, in 1893. Weinthal persuaded JB Robinson, one of the few mining magnates who supported Kruger, to take over the paper, which progressed from twice a week into a daily. But after the Jameson Raid, when Kruger imposed press censorship, Weinthal fell out with him and quit the paper. Two years later, in 1898, he launched his own daily paper, which he called *The Pretoria News*. Weinthal thus joins the modest pantheon of Jews who founded newspapers that have not yet closed down. He did not stay with the paper long; when the British seized Pretoria in 1900 he left for London, where he launched various illustrated news weeklies covering Africa, and also wrote African travel books and a biography of JB Robinson. An enthusiastic supporter of Kruger in his youth, he became an ardent British imperialist in middle age, and champion of a Cape to Cairo railroad.¹⁴

But we must return to Mendelssohn, who had backed the losing side in the Anglo-Boer War. Soon after the war ended, he visited Heath's Bar on the corner of Pritchard and Von Brandis in Johannesburg. There he met up with one Harry Freeman Cohen, to whom he poured out his sorry story.¹⁵ On the spur of the moment, Cohen offered to buy the business – at a knock-down price. Cohen was a British Jew who arrived in Johannesburg in 1888 and became a wealthy stockbroker, as well as a minor-league mining capitalist who controlled, for example, Rand Collieries. He was the brother-in-law of Harry Graumann, the first Jewish mayor of Johannesburg. Freeman Cohen was active in Jewish affairs, attending the inaugural meeting of the Jewish Board of Deputies and serving for a while as president of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation when a neutral person was needed to defuse yet another communal feud.¹⁶

A drawing of Freeman Cohen in the Johannesburg Public Library shows a dandyish man in a dress suit, smoking a cigar. I have found only one description of him, and it returns us to our theme of undersized Jews: "Harry Freeman-Cohen was a little man who had the face of a stage comedy Jew, but I never met a straighter, cleaner, or whiter man in my life." The man who wrote that was the local correspondent for the London *Daily Mail*, one Edgar Wallace, who a few months earlier had introduced Freeman Cohen to the excitements of a certain kind of journalism.¹⁷

The British military censors had put a near total blackout on news of the Anglo-

Boer War. Wallace alone among the war correspondents had sneaked around this. He had discovered that Freeman Cohen, as a stockbroker, regularly sent instructions to his brother in London about which shares to trade on the London stock exchange. Wallace invented a code whereby certain buy and sell messages had secret meanings relating to the progress of the war. In this way, the *Daily Mail* managed a number of major scoops, to the bewildered fury of the British military command.¹⁸

Wallace's greatest triumph was being first with the news of the final peace treaty, a mystery to all because he had not even bothered to hang around the military camp where the talks were being held. Twice a day during the long period of the talks, he would ride a train past the camp. There, a soldier – an old mate of Wallace, who had been a soldier himself – would pretend to blow his nose into a handkerchief whose colour could mean, for example, a peace treaty has been signed. Then Wallace would visit Freeman Cohen, and a coded message would be sent. The *Daily Mail* broke the story before many members of the British government knew about it.

So when Freeman Cohen bought *The Standard and Diggers News* from Mendelssohn, he naturally approached Wallace, the only journalist he knew, to be the editor, offering him around six times his current salary. Wallace accepted on the spot and suggested renaming the paper the *Rand Daily Mail* in honour of his former employer. The *Rand Daily Mail*, started in September 1902, quickly became Johannesburg's biggest-selling newspaper thanks to Wallace's feel for popular journalism, not to mention his vivid imagination – one story that particularly annoyed Lord Alfred Milner claimed that he had secretly bought Mozambique. Freeman Cohen took no interest in the editorial content; indeed his lack of interest might be revealed by this sentence from his own newspaper: "One might have expected of the Imperial Government to think twice before offering finalities for the overrunning of one of our most promising colonies with the very class of people that is being so strongly objected to in the mother country." The people referred to here are of course Russian Jews.¹⁹ Cohen did however fall out with Wallace after a mere nine months, but it was over the matter of the editor's reckless spending. He sacked Wallace, who attempted to kill himself with a revolver in his own office, was restrained by passers-by and left the country.²⁰ We should not mourn for Wallace who, capitalising on his flair for fiction, went on to become a world-famous author of detective novels, churning them

out at a rate of one every three weeks. They remained international best sellers in multiple languages for the next sixty years.²¹

A year later, Freeman Cohen died, and his brother sold the paper to a mining magnate, Abe Bailey, who wasn't in any way Jewish, and used the *Rand Daily Mail* as a platform to build his own publishing empire. Between Bailey and Rhodes and their successors, mining magnates would own every major big city English-language newspaper for the next ninety years. A Jew founded the *Rand Daily Mail*, but no Jew ever became its editor.

Continuing on the theme of undersized Jewish upstarts who smoked cigars, Isidore William Schlesinger measured 5 foot two and a half tall (1.57 metres). He was born in New York in 1871, and immigrated to South Africa at the age of 23, arriving with one suitcase filled with bars of the latest American fad, chewing gum. He sold them all and on the basis of that success, started one business after another. First, an insurance company called African Life Assurance which used aggressive American sales techniques. Then a property company called African Realty which developed such Johannesburg suburbs as Killarney and Orange Grove. Over time he came to own Johannesburg's finest hotel, the Carlton, where he lived for many years, the finest hotel in Mozambique, the Polana, and Zebedelia, the largest citrus farm in the world.²²

Schlesinger was fascinated by what we would today call the media. He was an early pioneer of movies, which he quickly dominated in South Africa by using the same technique as his Jewish counterparts in Hollywood: he bought up every aspect of the business. He owned the biggest local film production company and studio, a network of cinemas around the country and the rights to import Hollywood movies. He further started one of the world's first newsreel companies, African Mirror, bought up and merged a string of advertising agencies until his was South Africa's largest and pioneered what was perhaps the most shameful visual pollutant of all, outdoor billboard advertising. In 1930, Schlesinger bought out a string of small and failing local radio stations and merged them into a viable nationwide broadcasting company, the African Broadcasting Company. Alas for him, it was successful enough to be nationalised by the government in 1936 – it was renamed the SABC.

In 1935 Schlesinger bought his first newspaper, the *Sunday Express*. It was owned by Arthur Barlow, an opinionated and eccentric politician who hated all things British, had started his own political party and was in some ways the Julius Malema of

his day. Barlow was not Jewish, but he had a Jewish wife, Lily Nathan, whose family owned the Cecil Hotel in Bloemfontein. It was she who came up with the idea for his newspaper. Lily was extraordinarily energetic, and a genius at advertising sales, but despite her efforts, the newspaper quickly ran out of money. Barlow persuaded Schlesinger to bail him out, telling him he would become the Joseph Pulitzer of South Africa. Schlesinger kept Barlow on as editor, and let him write whatever he wanted with only one proviso: he wanted extensive and flattering coverage of his movies.²³

Barlow was the only newspaper editor of that era to hire a number of Jews as reporters. Whether his wife was the hidden hand behind this, we do not know, but it is worth pondering some possible reasons. Low pay might be one. Barlow's writers were generally unschooled, from the poorer homes, and he required them to work appalling hours at the lowest of salaries. They were cocky street kids, who differed from their Jewish contemporaries only in their lack of interest in business and social status. They probably could not get jobs down the road at the Anglo-dominated *The Star*. Unlike their parents, their home language was English, not Yiddish.

The big mainstream newspapers, owned by the mining magnates, behaved as monopolies do, and tried their best to stop Schlesinger. They blocked his access to the news wire services and the national distribution system run by the CNA. They poached his senior staff by offering higher salaries. That would have been enough to kill off almost anyone else, but Schlesinger merely treated it as a challenge. He started his own news wire service and his own newspaper distribution company, bought his own building and installed his own presses. In 1937 he launched a daily version of the *Sunday Express* in competition with *The Star* and then a daily and Sunday newspaper in Durban, the *Daily Tribune* and the *Sunday Tribune*. A Brooklyn Jew named Hank Margolies, a living embodiment of the Hollywood tabloid journalist, was imported to teach American-style populist journalism. Very soon, the Schlesinger papers became a significant threat to the long established, rather staid newspapers owned by the mining houses. Given a few more years, Schlesinger might well have become the Jew who owned the South African press.

But that never happened. It was the late 1930s, the height of the Nazi period, and antisemitic sentiment was on the rise. Schlesinger came under attack in parliament and in the local and British press, accused of fleecing widows and orphans with worthless insurance policies. The

Jewish Board of Deputies, convinced that Schlesinger's provocative newspapers were making antisemitism even worse, pressured him to sell out to his rivals, which he reluctantly did in 1939, for £300 000.²⁴ Four months later, war broke out. If Schlesinger had held on just a little longer, everything might have been different. Instead he was soon forgotten; his name barely features in South African press histories. But his most lasting effect on South African culture was that he took a staid, Anglophile colony, and Americanised its culture across all race and class barriers.²⁵

From what I can tell, only three Jews became editors of mainstream white English newspapers during the 20th Century. Two of those three started their careers as apprentices to Arthur Barlow. We'll start with the one who didn't, Joseph Langdon Levy, a portly and aristocratic English-born Jew, who edited the *Sunday Times* in a sober fashion for 32 years, a South African record. Levy loved theatre, books and the arts and cared rather less about politics. Despite having hardly any staff, he took the *Sunday Times* circulation to over 100 000 copies, until Barlow came along and ripped a giant gash in his sales.²⁶ The other two Jews who became editors were Joel Mervis, who for 18 years was editor of the *Sunday Times*, and Meyer Albert Johnson, better known as Johnny Johnson, who for two decades was editor of the right-wing, government sponsored *Citizen*. Both started their careers under Barlow, Johnson as a teenager, but Mervis as a young lawyer who had become bored with lawyering.

Mervis was the reason that the *Sunday Times* became known as the Jewish newspaper. If you needed to advertise a Jewish event, or a birth, wedding or death, there was no question: you put it in the *Sunday Times*. Mervis wrote a weekly column called The Passing Show, which included a cast of wise guys like Oscar Wildebeest, Ossip Broz and Skopl Topl, who to a Jewish ear, were quite obviously old *Yiddlach*, cracking Jewish jokes. Jews loved it; the English, in my experience, never quite got the point.²⁷

Mervis was one of the most successful editors in South African history, turning the newspaper into a national institution, its circulation way ahead of any rival. He stuck to the political centre where his readers were to be found. But he clashed constantly with a thin-skinned government because he kept going after politicians for the sins of greed, corruption or lying in public. Among the paper's most famous achievements was blowing the cover of the secret organisation behind the National Party, the Broederbond. This began with a lucky accident: the Broederbond were accidentally

sending their secret correspondence to a non-member who obligingly shared it with the *Sunday Times*. The first Broederbond exposes were the work of a Jewish reporter named Charles Bloomberg, who came under threat and found it prudent to leave the country in a hurry. He ended up in the UK where he helped write the popular World at War television series.²⁸

Joel Mervis ought to have gone on to the editorship of the *Rand Daily Mail*, the *Sunday Times*' sister paper and the company flagship. At one point he had been that paper's deputy editor. Given his commercial success and middle of the road politics, Mervis should have been the favourite. Yet he was not even on the short-list. And the talk was, there was a reason for this: no Jew would ever edit the *Rand Daily Mail*.

If Mervis was bitter, he kept it to himself. The claim that he had been denied the job because he was Jewish remained nothing but rumour until 2007, long after Mervis had died, when the last editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*, Rex Gibson, published a book that blew open more than one company secret. "In many ways, Mervis should have been the ideal candidate," said Gibson. "He had been deputy editor of the RDM and had the brains, the flair and the presence ... There was only one thing standing in the way of his appointment. He was Jewish. Anti-Semitism on the conservative board was entrenched and the idea of a Jew editing the flagship newspaper was unthinkable. Why, the man might not even be allowed to join the Rand Club."²⁹



**Joel Mervis, editor of the *Sunday Times*
1959-1975**

The curious irony was that a decade later, when the *Rand Daily Mail* job came up again, a Jew very nearly did get it. Or to rephrase that, he got it and instantly lost it. Meyer Albert Johnson was editor of Barlow's old paper, the *Sunday Express*. He followed very closely in the mould of Barlow, making the paper rather brash and

trashy, full of divorce scandals, crime and quite likely fiction, somewhat right-wing, and very successful. He called himself Johnny Johnson, which helped to hide his Jewishness. He was known to be a terror to work for.

One floor down at the *Rand Daily Mail*, Laurence Gandar, an editor far too liberal for the establishment, was about to be fired. The job was offered instead to Johnson, whose politics suited the board, and whose discreetly hidden Semitic origins may have been unknown to them. What lost Johnson the job was a furious fight-back from Gandar, who pointed out that replacing a liberal editor with a right-wing one on the eve of that paper receiving a World Press award for courageous journalism would not be smart public relations.³⁰ So Johnson was instead made a promise: he would get the *Sunday Times* when Mervis retired. It took a good few years before Mervis finally stepped down. But corporate memories are short, and the promise to Johnson was forgotten: he did not get the job. Foiled twice, he quit the *Sunday Express* in a rage. The paper became a rather more respectable under his successors, but it says something about Johnson's flair that the circulation dropped steadily from that moment on.

Not long after, Johnson, still unemployed, was the ideal candidate for the editorship of the newly launched *Citizen*, the first pro-apartheid English-language newspaper, which he edited for the next two decades with the relish of a man who had finally got his revenge. Johnson was hated in liberal circles for his unwavering enthusiasm for PW Botha's belligerent regime. He was also admired – at a distance – for his workaholic ability to produce a daily newspaper on almost no resources, because only the desperate were willing to work for him. A few years after the *Citizen* launched, it was exposed as a government funded front deliberately set up to destroy the *Rand Daily Mail*. The journalists who broke the story, which became known as the Information Scandal, were Johnson's own former staff at the *Sunday Express*.³¹ The expose did nothing to damage Johnson's editing career, which lasted well into the mid-90s. The *Citizen* is still published; the *Rand Daily Mail* has been dead for over three decades.

Were there no women in all this, you may be asking? Well, there were no women editors of any major newspaper until the 21st Century. Indeed, even when I started as journalist on the *Sunday Times* in the seventies, women were largely confined to writing light features and fashion. There is of course the exceptional case of Jane Raphaely, who as a publisher of women's magazines, falls just outside my subject matter. Still

it's worth noting how different her career has been from all the Jewish men I have mentioned. When she launched *Fair Lady* in 1965, she largely invented modern women's consumer magazines in this country. When she followed up with *Femina*, *Cosmopolitan* and *O Magazine*, she came to own the territory. She avoided being eaten alive by her partners, *Nasionale Pers*. She even steered a surprisingly liberal course with her magazines, given that *Nasionale Pers* were the official voice of Cape Nationalism, and this was the very height of the apartheid era.

Ruth First is known these days as a communist and a martyr, a white woman murdered by the apartheid security forces. But she began her career as one of the country's first investigative journalists. She worked for a Cape Town-based radical newspaper called *The Guardian*, arguably the most banned, most harassed and most courageous newspaper in South African press history, one whose entire staff was at various times in detention, one which had to keep changing its name and its editors – to *New Age*, *Spark*, *Clarion* – to keep one step ahead of the censors.³²

In 1947, at age 22, Ruth First started her first job, as the Johannesburg correspondent on *The Guardian*. In her first month she exposed conditions in a municipal compound by creeping in at night with a torch, and by her fifth month she had discovered a topic that she would doggedly investigate for the next ten years: the brutal condition of workers on South African farms. A brief summary would be that corrupt police would arrest African men for pass offences and offer them the choice of either working on a farm for six months or jail for a year. Most made the wrong choice, were sent to farms where they were treated much like slaves, chained, whipped, sometimes to death, set on by savage dogs, forced to sleep naked in icy conditions, swindled out of their promised wages, starved and much more.

For her first article on the subject, First took along with her a crusading Anglican priest, Michael Scott, and the local ANC leader, Gert Sibande, who helped her sneak into compounds on three farms, interview the workers and take photographs. Her opening paragraph read: "It is not every day that the Johannesburg reporter for *The Guardian* meets an African farm labourer who, when asked to describe conditions on the farm on which he works, silently takes off his shirt to reveal large wheals and scars whipped on his back, shoulders and arms."

But she had missed *The Guardian*'s weekly deadline – in those pre-email, in fact pre-telex days, she filed her copy by putting it in an envelope and posting it to Cape Town.

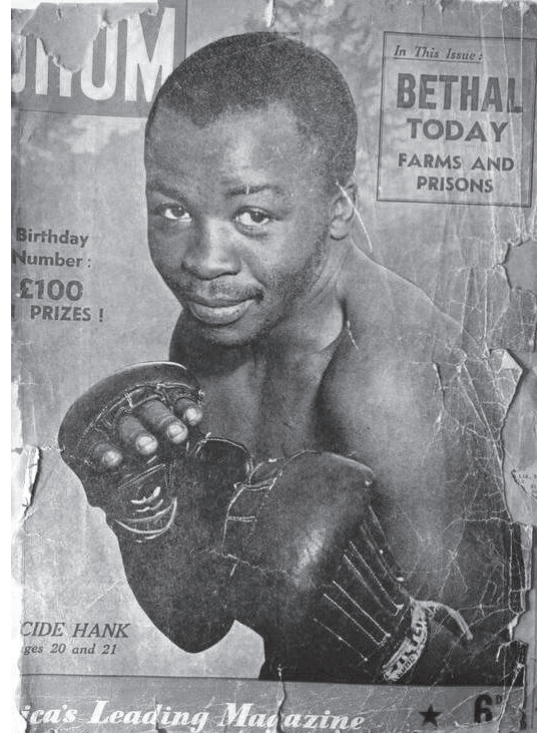
Under pressure from Scott, who wanted the story published immediately, she took it to the editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*. He was sceptical at first, but it helped that First had an Anglican priest at her side. After some checking by his own staff, the editor ran the story at modest size on page seven, under the headline “Near slavery in Bethal district”.

Because the story appeared in the (then) respectably mainstream *Rand Daily Mail*, rather than the far left *Guardian*, it was noticed, becoming front page news across the country. Prime Minister Jan Smuts hastily ordered a commission of inquiry, and a battery of policemen and labour inspectors raided 91 farms. The local farmers were in turn enraged at this interference with an age-old farming custom and held huge protest meetings, one of which almost ended with the lynching of First and Reverend Scott, who made the reckless mistake of attending it.

The Smuts government had taken it for granted that they would easily win the 1948 general election, a few months away. Now it dawned on them that they might lose the Afrikaner *platteland*. The police were pulled back from Bethal and charges against farmers were dropped. But the cover-up didn't help. In the election a few months later, Smuts lost the critical constituencies around Bethal, and the National Party scored a narrow victory. Such are the unintended consequences of journalism. A story by a young Jewish journalist, intended to expose farm brutality, instead brought the National Party to power.³³

Five years later, in 1952, a magazine called *Drum*, aimed at an African audience, ran an expose of the same Bethal farm brutality. The reporter, Henry Nxumalo, nicknamed Mr Drum, actually worked as a farm labourer and barely escaped with his life. More has been written about *Drum* magazine than any other South African publication because it became a showcase for some of the most talented and courageous African writers. What is seldom mentioned is that Nxumalo started his career on *The Guardian*, working with Ruth First. What is also very rarely mentioned is that Sylvester Stein, the former political correspondent of the *Rand Daily Mail* who edited *Drum* during one of its most creative periods in the mid-fifties, was a Jew. It was Stein, for example, who spotted and hired Nat Nakasa, the magazine's most famous journalist. It was also Stein who encouraged *Drum*'s literary fiction, now much admired as South African classics, but which were stopped when he left. And he came up with such escapades as sending Mr Drum to a series of white churches and photographing him being chased down

the streets by his fellow Christians. It was also Stein, in an article about the Olympic Games, who pointed out that the rules did not permit racial discrimination. Only then did anti-apartheid activists wake up to the possibilities of an international sports boycott.



South Africa's iconic Drum magazine. This issue includes a feature on the Bethal farm labour scandal.

But he is best-known for the manner of his departure. In October 1957, Stein planned a magazine cover showing the first black woman to win at Wimbledon, Althea Gibson, being kissed by her white runner-up Darlene Hard. In 1957 South Africa, this was a picture too far to risk. As *Drum*'s owner, Jim Bailey explained in his autobiography: “Sylvester, encouraged by his heady successes, intimidated to me that another major feature or so from him would topple the government. I thought ... that if anyone was going to be toppled it would be me and Sylvester.”³⁴ Stein was fired and the cover was changed. Stein gave the story of his demise to the news agencies. When Bailey arrived in Lagos a few days later to launch a Nigerian edition, he was met with hostile press accusing him of racism. Stein spent the next year writing a satirical novel about black life under apartheid, *Second Class Taxi*, which won wide critical acclaim. It also earned the government's own ultimate accolade: being banned immediately.

In 1955 Bailey launched what he called a “racy, modern, hard hitting and honest” Sunday newspaper called *Golden City Post*,

a distant ancestor to today's *City Press*. In nine months, the circulation topped 100 000, a remarkable feat for the time. The editor, Cecil Eprile, was a Scottish Jew, who arrived in South Africa in 1936, just in time to work for Arthur Barlow on another of his publications, *Arthur Barlow's Weekly*. He later became chief sub-editor of the *Sunday Times*, and for a longish interregnum, acting editor of the *Sunday Express*.³⁵ His deputy on *Golden City Post* was Hank Margolies, the same cigar-chomping, Brooklyn Jew who had been brought out by Schlesinger. Eprile and Margolies made *Golden City Post* into what may have been the most scurrilous tabloid to appear in South Africa, obsessed with tales of blood, sex and magic. It became the second largest newspaper in South Africa, with only the *Sunday Times* ahead of it. No subject matter was too sordid for *Post*. With one exception: it stayed clear of politics.³⁶

One gets some idea of the atmosphere of *Post* from this account by Stan Motjuwadi, a reporter under Eprile and later editor of *Drum* himself:

"How can you take yourself seriously when you have to work with such loveable eccentrics like editor Cecil Eprile? This is how a day would go by when I was news editor:

"Lloyd, where the hell have you been and what ..."

"Well, Cecil, the thing is ..."

"Never mind, you're fired!"

Half an hour later. "Stan, where is Lloyd?" "But Cecil, you fired him half an hour ago."

"Find him!" As I'm going out to find Lloyd at the Classic (a local shebeen) he's shouting: "Find him or you're fired!" ... Everyone enjoyed being fired by Cecil because it meant a day off."³⁷

There is no evidence that Bailey had any fondness for Jews, but here in the late-fifties his three most senior editorial staff on *Drum* and *Post*, namely Stein, Eprile and Margolies, were all Jewish.³⁸ Why was this? My guess is that a skilled, white Anglo-Saxon journalist was less likely to take a job on a black publication. *Drum* shared premises with the *Rand Daily Mail*, and there are various anecdotes about how its journalists were treated as second-class by their neighbours. Whether Jews were any less racist is debatable, but since they were marginal themselves, were never likely to rise to the editor's chair at a 'respectable' white newspaper, they were more willing to move into marginal enterprises.

In the late fifties, then, the editors of the

three largest circulation newspapers in the country, the *Sunday Times*, *Golden City Post* and *Sunday Express*, and the editor of the largest English language magazine, *Drum*, were all Jews. What they had in common, and this is essential in a successful mass market editor, was an acute instinct for the popular taste. The daily newspapers of the time, with their Gentile editors, were more likely to reflect the society values of the Rand Club.

The *Rand Daily Mail* never had a Jewish editor, but it had a surprising number of Jewish deputy editors. Mervis has already been mentioned. He was followed by Lewis Sowden, who unlike most of the Jews mentioned previously, was an intellectual rather than a street fighter. Indeed Lewis Sowden, MA, and his eccentric and frequently turbaned wife Dora, the *Rand Daily Mail's* music and arts critic, were between them the social hub of Jewish intellectual life in Johannesburg.³⁹ Lewis was a prolific writer of poems, non-fiction books, novels (at least seven of them), plays (six of them) and biographies. The kinder critics of his day compared his work to Nadine Gordimer. Dora wrote several studies of Jewish contributions to South African culture. Lewis Sowden's problem, not unusual among editors, was controlling his temper. One night when a visiting foreign musician made unflattering remarks from the stage about Dora (provoked by her unflattering review of his work in that morning's *Rand Daily Mail*), Lewis attacked the man in full view of the audience. He was later sent to New York to cover a speech to the United Nations by Foreign Minister Eric Louw, and halfway through, unable to contain himself, Sowden shouted from the gallery: "Half-truths, half-truths!" This outburst became a major political scandal at home, with Sowden accused of near treason. The *Rand Daily Mail* was obliged to demote him to a mere arts correspondent. His replacement as deputy editor was Ivor Benson, an avowed antisemite and good friend of the British fascist leader, Oswald Moseley.⁴⁰ The third Jew to be deputy editor was Ralph Cohen who, never fond of his own paper's liberalism, made the mistake of absconding to the *Citizen* when it launched. He soon clashed with his fellow Jew, Johnson, and quit. Persona non grata at his old paper, he edited the *Jewish Herald* for a while, making him the only 'mainstream' Jewish editor to cross into the community press.⁴¹

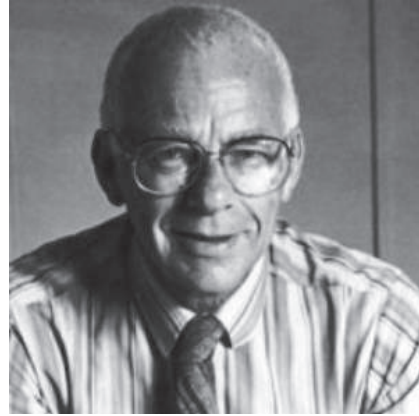
But the most famous of the deputy editors never to become editor, was the longest serving of them, Benjamin Pogrand. In the late fifties, Pogrand became the first reporter on a white newspaper assigned to cover black politics. This sounds odd today,

downright colonial to use current jargon, but in the fifties it was a bold step. Pogrund, a former Liberal Party member, became friendly with all the ANC leaders, and with Robert Sobukwe, leader of the PAC, about whom he wrote a book. But he was most famous for his prisons exposé.⁴²

The Prisons Act, born out of government spite following another *Drum* exposé⁴³, was designed to make it almost impossible to report adversely on prisons conditions. But the *Rand Daily Mail*, under the liberal editorship of Laurence Gandar - by the way, another



Meyer Albert ('Johnny') Johnson, Sunday Express Editor and first editor of The Citizen



Drum editor Sylvester Stein



Dora Sowden, music and arts critic



Ruth First, crusading investigative journalist



Benjamin Pogrund (right) with Laurence Gandar, photographed while on trial for the publication of an exposé on prison conditions.

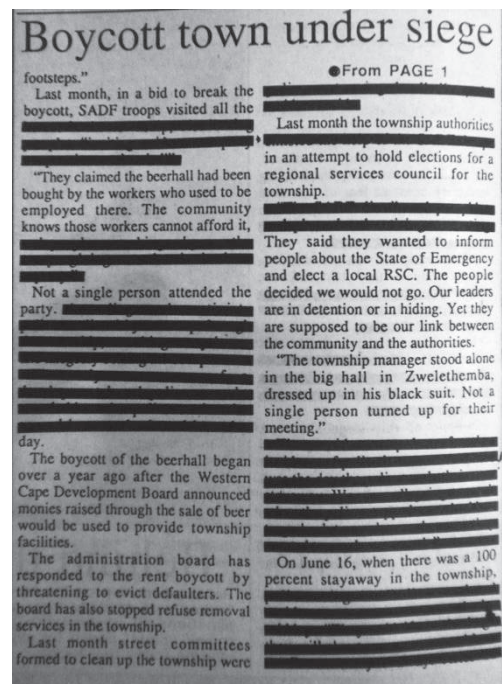
Schlesinger protégé - decided to risk it. Many of the black leaders whom Pogrund met had been in jail, and their stories were horrific. He spent months researching the topic, talking to both prisoners and prison warders, before writing a three-part series. The centrepieces were a 2000-word statement from former political prisoner Harold Strachan, and the confessions of former head warder Andries Theron, an honest man with a conscience. Prime Minister John Vorster, a former Minister of Prisons himself, demanded retribution. Strachan and Theron were both charged and convicted, and Strachan banned for years thereafter. Pogrund and Gandar faced an eight month trial during which a procession of more than a hundred state witnesses brazenly lied, frequently contradicting one another. The judge sentenced Pogrund and Gandar only to a fine – the trial had drawn international attention and a prison sentence may have been too risky politically – but the costs of the case were so prohibitive that no newspaper dared expose the prisons for another 25 years. Gandar lost his editorship; Pogrund was never forgiven. The last editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*, Rex Gibson, wrote that on his appointment, the board gave him only one instruction: Get rid of Pogrund. Gibson ignored the order.⁴⁴

Sometime in the 1960s, the kind of people who gravitated into journalism changed. It had been a largely male, largely lower-class, largely self-taught occupation. But in keeping with trends elsewhere in the world, it became increasingly professionalised. The people who arrived in newsrooms now had university degrees, which exposed them to the scorn of their seniors, who considered the school of life superior to any tertiary education. Worse, there were increasing numbers of women, who spilled out of the fashion pages into such male domains as politics. The university graduates were considered effete liberals, a not entirely inaccurate description, because a great many of them entered journalism as a social calling, a way to make a difference. The differences in attitude precipitated frequent clashes between youthful reporters and their grey haired editors. And although most of these graduates were not Jewish, a disproportionate number were, and they were to be found in particular at the *Rand Daily Mail*, writing about apartheid injustices, politics, feminism, consumer, health, education or labour issues. But that group were significantly weakened and dispersed by the death of the *Rand Daily Mail*.

The *Rand Daily Mail* had become too liberal for its white audience and lost readers and advertisers, many of them to Johnson's rival

Citizen. In 1985 it was closed down, along with its sister paper the *Sunday Express*. Large numbers of journalists were put out on the street, many of whom emigrated. Among the ranks of the unemployed were Anton Harber, political reporter of the *Rand Daily Mail*, and myself, assistant editor of the *Sunday Express*. The two of us decided on a whim to start our own newspaper to fill the political gap left by the death of the *Rand Daily Mail*. We put together a team: a lawyer, an accountant, a fund-raiser and a businessman. They had this in common: they knew nothing about newspapers and they were Jewish. The money they raised came, not surprisingly, mainly from Jews who had been shocked by the closure of the *Rand Daily Mail*. Half the Johannesburg Bar – or at least the Jewish half – contributed. Tony Bloom of Premier Milling and Isaac Joffe of Cape Gate were contributors. One of the most generous backers was a Cape Town property developer who had never met us, Benny Rabinowitz, who wisely said, "I won't treat this as an investment." A few years later, the largest investor became Joel Joffe, later known as Lord Joffe, who had been Nelson Mandela's attorney during the Rivonia Trial, before making the same hurried exit for London as many of his clients. The only printers brave enough to touch this high-risk enterprise were the Dannheiser family in Springs, Jewish of course, owners of the last small independent newspaper left in the Transvaal, *The Springs Advertiser*.⁴⁵

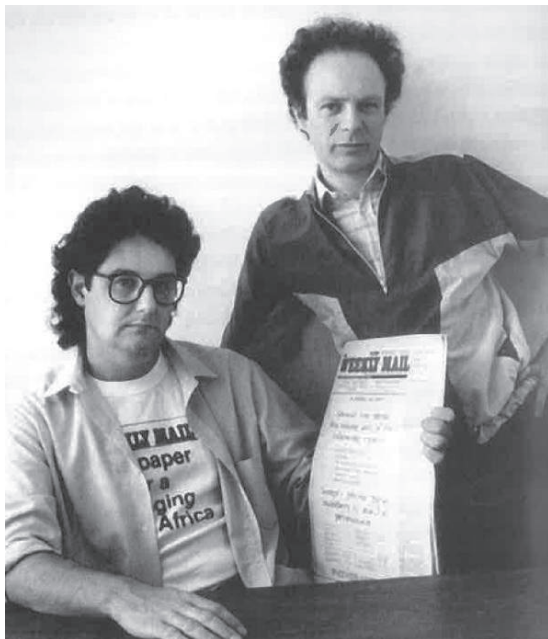
We named the newspaper *The Weekly Mail* in honour of the *Rand Daily Mail*. The paper



Part of a *Weekly Mail* report, showing censored sections.

was far more high-brow – and expensive – than any other, which narrowed its appeal, but of those who were willing to pay for it, many were Jewish. After our first issue appeared, a café owner, who could claim some expertise in the matter of newspaper sales, wrote to us: “I see your paper. I give you two months.” He was wrong, but only because, shortly before those two months were up, PW Botha declared a State of Emergency and clamped down heavily on the press. This gave us a reason for our existence. We spent the next five years playing cat and mouse games with censorship, trying to tell stories that could not be told, often using the act of censorship itself as a critique of censorship.

One of the big stories was a five part series written by a man who had shared a cell on Robben Island with Nelson Mandela. It was the first prisons exposé since Pogrund’s, 25 years earlier.⁴⁶ We also produced an exposé of slave labour conditions on Eastern Transvaal farms – unaware of the work forty years earlier by the banned and forgotten *Guardian*. Nothing much had changed. But in our case, the reporters actually bought three ‘slaves’ and took them to Johannesburg, where they were housed for some time on mattresses spread out on the newsroom floor.⁴⁷ Some of our reporters were jailed or shot – Philip Van Niekerk took a bullet straight through his jaw, missing his brain by a centimetre; Gavin Evans was shot from point-blank range from behind a pillar in our basement, but the gun jammed. The would-be killer was a policeman. Anton Harber spent months in the dock and built up quite a splendid charge



The author (standing, with Weekly Mail co-founder Anton Harber.

sheet, including some Victorian-era offences previously only used in prostitution cases. My bedroom and kitchen were firebombed one night; fortunately, neither was in use at the time. In 1988, after a long and public feud with the government, the paper was banned. An international outcry followed, with questions asked in the US Congress, and six weeks later we were allowed back on the streets.

After nine years we hit the same problem as all our Jewish predecessors: we ran out of money. Apartheid had ended, and the generous donors around town no longer felt a need for protest journalism. We were lucky to find a buyer: the British *Guardian*. They renamed the paper the *Mail & Guardian* and in traditional colonial fashion, shipped in their own people to take charge. Three of the directors, all Jews, myself among them, were quickly eased out. There was some *schadenfreude* to be enjoyed in that the British experts lost thirty times more money than ourselves. The paper changed hands yet again, and today there is not a single Jew on the staff.⁴⁸

Some of you will have noticed a strong Gauteng bias to this story. Surely there were prominent Jewish editors and owners elsewhere? If so, I have not come across them. In the official history of the *Cape Times* by Gerald Shaw, the only Jewish staffer mentioned is a proof-reader named Finkelstein, who achieved momentary fame when a practical joke proclaimed him in print as the first man to reach the moon.⁴⁹ In the autobiography of Horace Flather, who in a long career edited major newspapers in Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg, the only Jewish journalist to creep into the 200 page narrative is his rival, Joel Mervis, making a shamefaced confession at an editors’ dinner that his wife bought his shirts.⁵⁰ I have at times occupied desks at the *Natal Witness* in Pietermaritzburg, the *Sunday Tribune* in Durban, the *Daily Dispatch* in Grahamstown and *Die Volksblad* in Bloemfontein. Only at the latter did I encounter a Jew: the in-house graphic artist shyly revealed her *Boere Jood* lineage and asked me to keep her secret to myself.

How many Jews are there in South African newspapers these days? Hilary Joffe and Alan Fine were once deputy editors at *Business Day*, the last remaining hold-out for Jewish journalists. John Perlman was a feature and sports writer on the *Weekly Mail* before he absconded to radio. Jeremy Gordin was the publisher of the *Daily Sun*, a re-incarnation of the muti, gore and tokolosh formula of *Golden City Post*. In its heyday, in the days before poor people became too poor to buy the news, the *Daily Sun* was the largest-

selling paper in South African history.⁵¹ There are indeed some outstanding Jewish journalists right now, like Richard Poplak, Kevin Bloom and Mandy Wiener, but they do not work for newspaper companies. The Jews have left few footprints in the South African media. But they did take many of the first steps, played an important role as initiators of new media and as exposers of injustice, and this role deserves to be honoured.

NOTES

- 1 When I first worked on this paper in 2016, that was a favourite theme. By now, even more exotic names may have been added.
- 2 There have been a multitude of Jewish reporters, sub-editors, columnists and the like, and I apologise to all those whose siblings, uncles and aunts have failed to make the cut-off in this abbreviated history.
- 3 SA Rochlin, 'The Jew in South African Literature', in the 1929 *South African Jewish Year Book* [hereafter *SAJYB*], SA Historical Society, Johannesburg.
- 4 A possible reason for the British generosity is that Da Lima wrote the first history of the colony, which despite being written in Dutch, was tailored to flatter Lord Charles Somerset (Rochlin, *ibid.*)
- 5 *De Verzemelaar's* other minor claim to a place in local Jewish history is that in September 1847, two years before the foundation stone of Cape Town's first synagogue was laid, the paper published what may have been the first notice congratulating "those of the Jewish persuasion with their New Year on this day" (JS Judelowitz, 1929 *SAJYB*, *op cit.*)
- 6 A useful biography of Saul Solomon by MW Rabinowitz appears in the 1929 *SAJYB*. It contains the following line, which tells us something about both Solomon and Rabinowitz: "There can be no doubt that Solomon's negrophilism later weakened his influence when carried to extremes, as when he invited a Basutho delegation to dinner."
- 7 A slightly different version of the tale is that Solomon lost interest in his newspaper in 1880 after his beloved five-year-old daughter and her governess drowned, plunging him into depression. (*A Manner of Speaking: Origins of the Press in South Africa*, by Wessel De Kock, Saayman & Weber, Cape Town, 1982). Another factor was the launch of the rival *Cape Times*, which undercut the *Argus* on price and was the first paper to appear daily. Dormer bought the *Cape Argus* for £6000. Years later, having become a central figure in the SA press and founder of *The Star* in Johannesburg, he split with Rhodes over British imperialism and quit the company.
- 8 In 1877, another Solomon, Harry Solomon, founded the *Port Elizabeth Observer*, which lasted nine years. Harry, unlike Saul (probably no relation) was unambiguously Jewish and active in the local community (Rochlin, *op cit.*)
- 9 The most comprehensive profile of Emanuel Mendelssohn is by Richard Mendelsohn: 'Oom Paul's Publicist: Emanuel Mendelssohn, founder of the first congregation', in Kaplan, M. and Robertson, M. (eds), *Founders and Followers*, Vlaeberg Publishers, 1991.
- 10 Mendelssohn was at first co-owner of the *Standard and Transvaal Mining Chronicle* with his long-time partner Robert Scott, and then bought the *Diggers News* from a fellow Jew named I Susskind, who is remembered by history only as the father of a then-famous cricket player (Eric Rosenthal, 'Jewish Gold Pioneers', 1929 *SAJYB*).
- 11 The editor of the newspaper, who is inclined to be forgotten here, was Joseph van Gelder, referred to as a Jewish journalist in 'The Jew in South African Literature' by SA Rochlin (1929 *SAJYB*).
- 12 Discerning readers will note the remarkable resemblance to contemporary South Africa.
- 13 *The Tycoon and the President*, Helga Kaye, MacMillan Johannesburg, 1978.
- 14 Rosa Swanepoel in *The Heritage Portal Newsletter*, February 2015. Weinthal, a prominent writer in his day died in 1930.
- 15 There are various versions of this story; I have chosen the account by Joel Mervis in *The Fourth Estate*, Jonathan Ball, 1989.
- 16 Freeman Cohen is a minor figure in Marian Robertson's history of Jewish stockbrokers, and in her biography (with Nathan Mendelow) of Harry Graumann, both in *Founders and Followers* (*ibid.*).
- 17 *Edgar Wallace by Himself*, 1932. Published online by Project Gutenberg.
- 18 Various versions of the story appear in: Mervis (*op cit.*); in *Edgar Wallace, A Biography* by Margaret Lane, The Book Club, 1939; and in *War of Words: Memoir of a South African Journalist*, by Benjamin Pogrud, Seven Stories Press, 2000.
- 19 The quote was spotted by Rabbi Gerald Mazabow in his *The Quest for Community: A short history of Jewish communal institutions in South Africa, 1841-1939*, (Houdini Publishers, Johannesburg, in association with the Kaplan Centre, UCT, 2008).
- 20 According to Mervis, *op cit.*
- 21 He died while writing the script for the Hollywood smash hit, *King Kong*.
- 22 Given that Schlesinger was arguably the most successful Jewish businessman in South Africa, surprisingly little has been written about him. The best profile, which concentrates mainly on his financial interests and says little about the newspapers, is by Mendel Kaplan and Marian Robertson in their *Jewish Roots in the South African Economy*, Struik Publishers 1986.
- 23 Mervis (*ibid.*) who worked for Schlesinger, provides a first-person account of the boss's indifference to editorial matters. H Lindsay Smith's *Behind the Press in South Africa* (Stewart Printing, 1948) is the only other critical account of the SA press to give Schlesinger his due, also based on first-person knowledge.
- 24 The *Sunday Express* was bought by the *Sunday Times* and *Rand Daily Mail*, and Schlesinger's premises and printing plant, corner Main and Mooi Streets, became the headquarters of the three papers. The *Sunday Tribune* remains the Argus Company's Natal Sunday paper to this day. The *Daily Express* and *Daily Tribune* were immediately closed down
- 25 For the opinion of a rival, see the following from the Argus Company's most senior editor, Horace Flather: "Like most little men, 'IW' was short-tempered and

- intolerant ... and he pursued his little hate over a long and embarrassing period." Flather claims that an editorial in *The Argus*, criticising the appointment of Schlesinger to the first SABC board as a conflict of interest, enraged him into starting his own daily papers as revenge. "The Schlesinger papers looked good ... but much of the news they published was unreliable ... There is a tradition in South Africa that newspapers tell the truth and the population is not big enough to support phoney papers" (*The Way of an Editor*, Horace Flather, Purnell and Sons, Cape Town, 1977).
- 26 All three of these men appear in Mervis' book, *The Fourth Estate* (ibid).
- 27 Mervis wrote everything by pen (he never learnt to type) and my own first job on the *Sunday Times* was typing out the Passing Show for him.
- 28 Bloomberg, rather more of an intellectual than most journalists, spent five years researching the Broederbond and wrote a book about it. For more about his adventures, see John Matisonn's press history, *God, Spies and Lies* (Missing Ink, Cape Town, 2015).
- 29 *Final Deadline. The last days of the Rand Daily Mail*, Rex Gibson, David Philip, Cape Town, 2007.
- 30 Gibson, Ibid.
- 31 The *Sunday Express* was then edited by Rex Gibson.
- 32 The Gupta brothers named their newspaper *The New Age* in honour of the original, to which it bears no resemblance. The historical reference was lost on most of the public, but not on the ANC old guard.
- 33 *The Guardian*, James Zug (Michigan University Press, 2007) and *Writing Left, the Radical Journalism of Ruth First*, Don Pinnock, UNISA Press, 2007.
- 34 *The Beat of Drum*, Ravan Press, 2001. Bailey added: "He could walk over the road to land another job; I would be left with the ruin of the paper, the debts, and a fine staff to be sacked."
- 35 He had also been chairman of the SA Jewish Journalists Association.
- 36 Although the editor of the Natal editions of both *Drum* and *Post*, GR Naidoo, says he hired Chief Albert Luthuli as a columnist until he was banned. (GR Naidoo in *The Beat of Drum*, op cit.)
- 37 Stan Motjuwadi in *The Beat of Drum*, op cit.
- 38 Eprile and Stein were obliged to share staff and resources, leading to frequent clashes. "Steyn was a good editor, but there was much bitterness between himself and Eprile. Bailey had to step in on many an occasion to get some semblance of peace in his newsroom." (Naidoo, op cit.)
- 39 Jews did gravitate to the arts pages; Percy Baneshik ruled *The Star's* arts section, and other arts writers included Peter Feldman, Joyce Ozinsky and Barbara Ludman.
- 40 Anecdotes from Gibson, op cit. Gibson remarks that neither the musician nor Sowden were much suited to physical violence, with results more farcical than bloody.
- 41 The highest-ranking Jew on the Mervis *Sunday Times* was assistant editor Joe Kuttner, one of the earliest Barlow-Schlesinger protégés, and one of the few "mainstream" journalists to contribute regularly to the community press. At *The Star*, where Jews were scarce, the most prominent Jew to rise to senior ranks was Arnold Benjamin, as assistant editor and columnist. *The Star* did employ two Jewish cartoonists, Dov Fedler and Abe Berry.
- 42 *War of Words, Memoir of a South African Journalist*, Benjamin Pogrand, Seven Storey Press, New York.
- 43 When Henry Nxulamo had himself arrested and then reported a shameful tale from inside The Fort.
- 44 Gibson, op cit.
- 45 Which is itself an interesting story: The Dannheiser family bought the paper in 1948 and two generations of siblings ran it for over half a century. Nadine Gordimer had her first job there. The Dannheisers showed considerable courage during a period when printers were at risk from the government. Their tiny, old-fashioned, newspaper press printed most of the local "alternative" newspapers, as well as the newsletters and pamphlets of trade unions and the United Democratic Front. I was personally a witness to late night security police raids on their plant when the *Weekly Mail* was being printed. They also printed publications from the far-right, their motto being: "We aren't censors."
- 46 His name was Thami Mkhwanazi, and he arrived at the paper announcing that he had been "instructed" to join our staff by his fellow prisoners, who were enthusiastic readers of what little the prison censors allowed them to see – often no more than shards topped by page numbers. We got away with it because Mkhwanazi confined himself to descriptions of his fellow prisoners – something the Prisons Act had not anticipated.
- 47 The senior reporter on the story, Eddie Koch, who died recently, also lodged the "slaves" at his home until he found them employment.
- 48 See: *You Have Been Warned*, Viking, Johannesburg, 1996, edited by myself.
- 49 Shaw, G, *The Cape Times, An Informal History*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1999.
- 50 The other Jew in the book is another rival, IW Schlesinger, detested by Flather. (Flather, op cit.)
- 51 The story is that Gordin was fired for writing an insulting letter to Brian Molefe, at the time still the respectable head of Eskom. This is partly true. He was actually fired from the *Sunday Times* for that lapse in etiquette.

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UNLIKELY VIGILANTES – EXTRA-JUDICIAL RESPONSES TO NAZISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

*

David Saks

During the last decades of the 19th Century, the South African Jewish community embarked on a sustained period of dramatic growth, primarily as a result of immigration from Eastern Europe. One of the unfortunate, if probably inevitable side-effects of the influx was that for the first time, antisemitic modes of thinking began emerging as a significant element in the political and cultural discourse of the country. In response, the community developed formal representative structures whose core mandate was to safeguard the civil rights of South African Jewry, and in particular to confront the antisemitic threat wherever it surfaced.

Since 1903, this function has primarily been carried out by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD). In recent decades, a substantial role in this area has also been played by the Community Security Organisation (CSO), which was founded under the auspices of the SAJBD in the early 1990s and which continues to work closely with its parent body in all matters concerning Jewish safety, security and psychological well-being.

The SAJBD, CSO and other major communal organisations (notably, the SA Zionist Federation) that have involved themselves in promoting Jewish civil rights over the years have always operated as formally-constituted representative bodies operating at all times within the official laws and structures of their society. Their work has included making representations to government, educating the broader public via the media and other vehicles, building alliances through interfaith activities and, in more serious cases, instituting court action.

Parallel to this, however, there has also been a tradition of informal, extra-legal Jewish activism against antisemitism, of which, for obvious reasons, much less is known. This phenomenon was primarily in evidence during the 1930s, in retrospect the heyday of antisemitism in South Africa, but there would subsequently be other occasions where Jewish defence groups would – with varying results – take the law into their own

hands to deal with real or perceived threats.

The ‘Shirt’ movements

In the 1930s, antisemitism in South Africa reached unprecedented heights of virulence. The rise to power of the Nazi movement in Germany helped to spawn numerous imitators throughout the world, all characterised by ultra-nationalist, racist and radically antisemitic ideologies. In South Africa, such activities were especially prevalent in the southwestern and eastern Cape Province, northern Natal and on the Witwatersrand, although they surfaced from time to time in all parts of the country. The best known of the Nazi spinoff movements was the South African Gentile National Socialist Movement, subsequently known as the Greyshirts. Other right-wing organisations with explicitly antisemitic programmes active during the period included the *Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Demokratiese Beweging* (Blackshirts), *Bond van Nasionale Werkers* (Brownshirts), *Oranjehemde* (Orangeshirts) and *Volksbeweging* (aka the South African Gentile Organisation). In public meetings in all parts of the country, its spokesmen propagated the message that “Jews had fomented the Boer War, incited Blacks against white civilisation, controlled the press, dominated the economy and exploited Afrikaners”.¹ As described by Milton Shain:

Doing their best to appeal to dislocated and unskilled whites, these movements consistently blamed the Jew for the country’s woes. By mid-1936 six independently branded ‘Shirtist’ groups were in existence, some operating as breakaways, others newly created. Led for the most part by disillusioned and angry young men, these fascist clones traversed the country aping the politics of their European mentors. Filled with conspiratorial bluster, they crudely alerted South African whites to the exploitative, menacing and evil Jew. Propagating fantasies, flirting with notions of ‘Aryanism, and peddling international Jewish conspiracies and other outrageous fabrications, they took advantage of enhanced rail and road communications

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

and improved literacy to spread their toxic message.²

The Greyshirts, headed by Louis Weichardt, had its headquarters in Cape Town and maintained branches in all four provinces. Himself of German extraction, Weichardt dedicated his efforts in the pre-war years to spreading the doctrine of National Socialism throughout the country, and to that end relied heavily on crude Jew-baiting strategies.



Greyshirts founder and leader Louis Weichardt

The SAJBD spearheaded the official Jewish community response to the ultra-right menace, most notably in successfully exposing several of the leading Greyshirts for propagating as fact a crude antisemitic forgery loosely based on *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* in a famous court-case held in Grahamstown in 1934. Unofficially, however, the Greyshirts and their fellow travellers also on occasion found themselves unexpectedly confronted by well-organised Jewish vigilante bands whose members had no compunction in taking them on physically in order to break up their meetings. Interestingly, the latter included in their ranks many dogmatic Marxist activists who under normal circumstances would not have chosen to identify themselves with specifically Jewish causes but chose to do so in this case because of their abhorrence of racism and antisemitism.

One of the fullest recorded accounts of how South African Jews physically confronted antisemitic agitators can be found in the posthumously published memoirs of Leo Lovell, then a Benoni-based lawyer who later became a long-serving Labour Party MP and forthright opponent of apartheid. Lovell was



Greyshirt armband. Orange was chosen as the colour of the swastika because of its association with the Dutch national independence struggle against Spain, something reflected in, inter alia, the naming of the Orange Free State and the inclusion of orange in the then South African flag.

centrally involved in planning the violent break-up of two Blackshirts public meetings in Benoni in 1938. The following passage describes how the first of these meetings, held outside the municipal offices on 14 May of that year, was disrupted:

I ordered them in section by section. I led the last section into the crowd and charged for the platform. Simultaneously the rest of the sections did the same. One hundred and twenty men charging from the perimeter of the huge gathering cut the crowd in two and so sudden and swift was the onset, that the Blackshirts and their supporters had no time even to bring their weapons into play, when they were hurled against the wall behind them and the table was smashed. Using the planks from the broken table, my men belaboured the vanquished Blackshirts in view of the huge crowd. By now the police had rushed in, in a formidable crescent, with batons raised striking right and left. My own men retreated and ran as ordered and the unfortunate recipients of many a blow with the batons, were members of the crowd who couldn't get away in time. I am almost certain that the impetus of the charging police brought them right among the floundering Blackshirts, many of them strewn on the ground, who, in addition to the blows administered by ourselves, also received unintended injuries from the flailing batons.³

It should be mentioned that Lovell had first approached the courts to prohibit the rally. Only once legal options were exhausted did

he commit himself to extra-judicial action. Lovell and a smaller number of protestors went on to disrupt a second Greyshirts meeting shortly afterwards. At a third rally a few months later, Greyshirt speakers were pelted with rotten tomatoes and noisily heckled, and ultimately the police had to escort them and their supporters to the police station for their own safety.⁴

Individual Jews also periodically became embroiled in violent altercations at Greyshirts rallies. Rebecca Hodes has described how two young Jewish immigrants, Max Raysman and Jack Rubin, took part in reducing one such meeting, held on the Grand Parade, Cape Town, on 2 April 1936, to “a chaotic brawl”.⁵ This particular rally was addressed by the overall leader of the Greyshirts himself, Louis Weichardt. Both Rubin and Raysman were arrested and charged for their involvement in the violence, after which they were taken to hospital for injuries sustained in the fighting. Both, Hodes notes, “had heard about the Greyshirt meeting while at the Maccabi club, a gym on Long Street in Cape Town’s city center, and had decided to attend in a show of strength and opposition to the antisemitism that characterized Greyshirt public meetings”.



Leo Lovell, 1907-1976

While radical rightwing events in the major urban centres were not infrequently disrupted, sometimes violently, in the smaller towns,

where the Jewish population was invariably small, they generally went ahead without incident. One poignant episode nevertheless demonstrates how at least one Greyshirts meeting, held in the town of Smithfield in the Orange Free State, was brought to a premature close. Amongst those in attendance at the gathering was a member of the local Jewish community, Joseph ‘Jakkals’ Segall, famed for his record of having fought under General Christiaan de Wet during the latter half of the Anglo-Boer War. He made no impassioned speech about the evils of antisemitism. Instead, he stood up and stated simply, “*Ek is Jakkals, wie vir die Boere geveg het*”. As a result, the meeting broke up soon afterwards.⁶

Jewish leftists had a dual motivation in confronting the Greyshirts, since thereby they would be striking a blow against both antisemitism and the foremost ideological adversary of the world communist movement, fascism. It is worth noting that much of what was happening in South Africa took place against the backdrop of the civil war in Spain, where left and right, represented by the Republican and Nationalist factions, were engaged in a ruthless battle over the country’s future and thousands of international volunteers were serving on both sides. In South Africa, a high proportion of those Jews who physically confronted the ultra-right menace were firmly in the communist camp. One of them was Jack Flor, as it happens, the only South African known to have served in the pro-Republican International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. In a 1994 interview, he recalled his involvement in local anti-fascist activities:

We were fighting like hell all the time. I was arrested one time, on the steps of the [Johannesburg] Town Hall. The Greyshirts used to come there and organise their meetings and we used to come and break it up. I remember the paper reported that two children were arrested – that was me and my younger brother [*Mendel, later killed in action in World War II – ed.*]. You see, I was wearing short pants and they thought I was a child. But it was not only Jews fighting against them – in those days there was Johanna Cornelius, an Afrikaner woman and her sister, Esther. We also went to Pretoria to break up meetings of the Greyshirts.

On one occasion we demonstrated against the Greyshirts, and the man who was leading them was Vorster, who was South African prime minister in later years. I remember him dressed in black shirt and black trousers. The Jewish Workers Club

participated, but there were other people also. One of our members, Menahem Mendel Yudelowitz, who was born in Palestine, was with us. He jumped up at the flag of the Greyshirts, pulled it down and tore it up. And then everyone fell upon him, and we pulled him out, bleeding.⁷

Former Cape Town mayor Alfred Harold Honikman records another instance of Jewish anti-Greyshirt activity in Johannesburg, where he was then working as an architect:

When a Jewish cemetery near Johannesburg was vandalized, a number of young Jewish boys formed themselves into a vigilante body and stationed groups at potential Greyshirt targets. Waiting in watch outside a synagogue, they saw four Greyshirts step out of a car and stealthily approach the building. One was carrying a can of gasoline, the others, logs of wood. They stopped at a side window. One was unscrewing the can cap when the vigilantes emerged from the shadows and pounced on them. The would-be arsonists abandoned their plot and ran for their car, leaving behind the gasoline can and logs. For a while, the incident appeared to mark the end of Greyshirt activity on the Rand!⁸

The Hillbrow Beerhall Incident

Under very different circumstances, outraged Jewish youth again came together to confront Nazi sympathisers in May 1967, following reports that the previous week Hitler's birthday had been celebrated at a beerhall frequented largely by German immigrants in Hillbrow. On 5 May, an estimated 1000 protestors gathered outside the beerhall and a few dozen found their way into the venue itself, disrupting proceedings by dancing and singing Hebrew songs.

Most of the violence that ensued took place outside, with baton-wielding policemen clashing with a number of Jewish youths and tear-gas being used to break up the gathering. As reported by *Sunday Express* deputy news editor Desmond Blow (who was himself severely beaten by the police, despite making them aware of his journalistic credentials), punches were thrown, and some Germans chanted '*Sieg Heil*'. There were more shouts of '*Heil*' as police took away four Jewish boys, who later paid admission of guilt fines of R6 for disturbing the peace". According to Blow, an immigrant said that a few Hitler supporters had stood and drank toasts to Hitler on his birthday the previous week, adding, "Most of us joined

in – anything for a party, especially as we are so far away from home – but few of us think much of Hitler. It was all a bit of fun". A Jewish protestor was quoted by the Eastern Province Herald as saying, "We don't like the fact that neo-Nazis are active here – after what our people went through during and before the war. We do not propose to be passive about what we feel is a threat here".

The fracas received front-page coverage in the mainstream media and was considered serious enough to be discussed in parliament. The following summary of what happened was presented by United Party Member for Hillbrow Dr G P Jacobs:

...based on my interviews, and in all good faith, I should like to put this position before the House. Some months ago a new beer hall was opened. It was advertised as a German beer cellar. It built up a clientele quite soon, and it was frequented, not unnaturally, by German-speaking people who included a fair sprinkling of young German immigrants. People went there at night to drink beer and to sing German folk songs and nobody in his senses can make any objections to that. On the 20th April, a date which coincided with Hitler's birthday, there are reports that events took a new turn. Now, I want to say quite clearly I do not know what the motives are that were involved, but from all accounts some of the youths produced a portrait of Hitler and began to dance and prance around it, shouting slogans and giving salutes which were reminiscent of the Nazi era.

There were reports of this particular gathering and these reports came to the notice of many people and also to groups of Jewish youths. They saw this as provocative behaviour. To them it signified the introduction in South Africa of a new Nazi cult and they decided to retaliate. And so there were disturbances. At first they were in a small form, but they culminated on the 5th May in a disturbance of quite some major proportion. From all accounts it involved a police force of some 200 men and the police had to resort to the use of tear-gas, a baton charge and dogs, to disperse not only the trouble-makers but the hundreds of spectators who had gathered....the reports that I have had were to the effect that the police behaved with commendable restraint and with competence. For this we are all pleased. Fortunately there was no damage to property and there was no loss of life.⁹



Protestors and police outside the Deutscher Keller beer garden, 5 May 1967 (Rand Daily Mail)

Prime Minister B J Vorster, who is mentioned by Jack Flior as a participant in a Greyshirt demonstration and who went on to campaign for the far-right Ossewabrandwag during World War II, predictably expressed scepticism over whether any pro-Nazi demonstration had taken place at all and warned that the police had been instructed to crack down hard on illegal protests, whether carried out by Jews, Italians or anyone else. He further took a swipe at “irresponsible journalists and undisciplined university students” who were giving South Africa a bad name and stirring up ill-feeling within the white population (“no newspaperman who is worth his salt and who has the interests of South Africa at heart, and no newspaperman who is interested in good relations between Jewish citizens and German citizens, or English- and Afrikaans-speaking people, writes like this to incite groups against each other, as was done on this occasion”).

One thing clearly demonstrated by the Hillbrow incident was a strengthened sense

of resolve amongst young Jews to confront, physically if necessary, any potential attempts to revive the rabidly antisemitic, neo-Nazi ideologies of bygone years. In part, no doubt, this was due to the greater sense of security that came with being second or third generation South Africans, as opposed to being in the main first-generation immigrants, which was largely the case with South African Jews during the 1930s. The Israeli factor, with its accompanying introduction of a new kind of Jew who took robust steps to defend himself where required, would also have played its part. But there would have been a more sobering reason for this unusual display of Jewish militancy. In the post-Holocaust era, Jews now recognised what comparatively innocuous events such as the Hillbrow beerhall affair might ultimately lead to if not firmly confronted from the outset.

NOTES

- 1 Mendelsohn, R, and Shain, M, *The Jews in South Africa: An Illustrated History*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2008, pp105-6.
- 2 Shain, M, *A Perfect Storm – Antisemitism in South Africa 1930-1948*, p2.
- 3 *For the Love of Justice: The Autobiography of Leo Lovell*, Isaac & Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town, 2009, pp70-1; *Die Volksblad*, 14 May 1938
- 4 Ibid, pp73-5.
- 5 Hodes, R, “‘Free Fight on the Grand Parade’: Resistance to the Greyshirts in 1930s South Africa”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, May 1, 2014.
- 6 Saks, D, *Boerejode – Jews in the Boer Armed Forces 1899-1902*, Johannesburg, 2010, p4.
- 7 Suttner, Immanuel (ed.), *Cutting through the Mountain: Interviews with South African Jewish Activists*, Viking: Penguin Group, 1997, p302
- 8 Honikman, A H, *Almost a Century*, Dog Ear Publishing, 2007, p129
- 9 House of Assembly Debates, 8 May 1967, Col. 5658-5666

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HELEN SUZMAN BLUE PLAQUE UNVEILING

*

Kathy Munro

7 November 2017 marked the centenary of the Russian Revolution, and also of the birth of one of South Africa's greatest 20th Century daughters, Helen Suzman. On Friday, 3 November, a small group gathered to remember and pay tribute to Suzman, with the unveiling of a blue plaque on the pavement at 13 Eton Road Parktown. This was an initiative of the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation. The plaque was unveiled by Helen's daughters, Frances and Patricia.

Heritage doyenne Flo Bird spoke with warmth and affection of Helen Suzman, her humanity and contribution to the fight for a democratic South Africa. We of the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation are proud of her achievements. She was for 13 years the sole Progressive Party MP for Houghton in the white Parliament, a doughty, sharp tongued, brave anti-apartheid activist and fighter. She stood for liberalism and justice for all when in a minority of one. When Helen died in 2009, the speeches at the memorial event in Wits' Great Hall were fulsome in their recognition of her moral authority and contribution to our history. The Helen Suzman Foundation in Johannesburg continues to work in her name.

The circular striking blue plaque to remember Helen is set on a concrete plinth on the pavement. It is made of a ceramic composition material and fits in the series of Johannesburg's cultural legacy.

Originally, the Gavronsky family home stood on this generous-sized stand, possibly an acre in expanse, when Eton Road was a street of private upper-class homes in the premier suburb of Parktown. The original home is recalled by Helen's daughters as Herbert Baker-designed, circa early 20th Century built of kopjie quartz stone. There was originally a tennis court in the garden.

Kathy Munro is an Honorary Associate Professor in the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand. Having trained as an economic historian, she now researches and writes on historical architecture and heritage matters and has a regular book review column on the online Heritage Portal (where an earlier version of this article first appeared). She is Vice-chairperson of the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation and a voluntary docent at the Wits Arts Museum.



It was from this home that Helen Gavronsky was married (to Dr Moses Suzman) in 1937. Today, the site is occupied by a new office block of the Taback law firm and the property is owned by PPS (Professional Provident Society). The grounds exude an office park feel as an echo of the original gardens of the family home remains with established oak trees, shrubs and roses and a brick drive way leads to the garden terraces ending in the rear wall that backs onto Rockridge Road. Two doors away is the Donald Gordon Hospital, which now almost overwhelms the street.

Helen Gavronsky was born in Germiston on 7 November 1917. She was the second daughter of Samuel Gavronsky, a wholesale butcher who also dealt in hides and skin, and Frieda David. Her family were of Lithuanian Jewish immigrant stock. Frieda Gavronsky died two weeks after Helen's birth, and Helen was nurtured by her maternal aunt, Hansa. In 1921, the Gavronsky family moved to a house in Alexandra Street, Berea, Johannesburg. Sam Gavronsky remarried in 1927 and relocated his family, comprising his new wife Debby and two daughters, Gertrude and Helen, to 13 Eton Road. Helen described her Parktown home in her memoir *In No Uncertain Terms* (1993) as "a sprawling old stone house in the suburb of Parktown, built by the famous English architect, Sir Herbert Baker, with a large garden shaded by huge oak trees and a tennis court". She expands, "I loved the

house, though it was freezing in winter, as it faced south (had Sir Herbert forgotten he had crossed the equator?"). This was the Gavronsky family home until Sam's death in 1965. At the age of 10, Helen was enrolled at Parktown's Holy Family Convent for girls, on Oxford Road (today the Holy Family College).

A Catholic convent, all girls and private, for a Jewish girl from an aspiring and successful immigrant family was perhaps a surprising choice, but not an unusual one. Helen commented that she went to the convent as in those days Anglican schools were reluctant to take Jewish children whereas Catholic schools were more willing to do so. Parktown Convent gave her a sense of status, identity and self-possession. Her world was shaped by an English-speaking, Anglo-Jewish middle class white Johannesburg milieu. Helen Gavronsky was remembered as a talented, precocious, charismatic pupil who had a certain presence from a young age. Today, the Holy Family College remembers her with a secluded rose garden and a memorial flagstone that recalls her time with and contribution to the convent.

Helen matriculated early at the age of 16. She enrolled at the University of the Witwatersrand but did not complete her B Com degree until several years later, interrupting her studies to marry Moses Suzman. On marrying, she left her family's Parktown home to live in Northcliff.

The plaque reads:

Helen Suzman - Fighter for justice and human rights, Helen Suzman (nee Gavronsky) lived in the original house on this stand until her marriage in 1937. She was awarded the Order of Merit (Gold) South Africa in 1995 for her 38 years' struggle as a member in the white South African Parliament.

"Her courage, integrity and principled commitment to justice have marked her as one of the outstanding figures in our history" (*Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela*) Johannesburg Heritage Foundation.

In my capacity of vice-chair of the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation, I paid tribute to Helen Suzman and reminded our group of the importance and success of the blue plaque movement in Johannesburg. Through this simple device, we are able to celebrate architecture, people, events, historic occasions and places. We tell the significant history in a mere 100 words and bring heritage and history to life. The blue plaque is a trigger to memory and a means of conveying the past with immediacy and visibility to a new generation.



Unveiling of the plaque by the daughters of Helen Suzman, Patricia and Frances, 3 November 2017.

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“FOR THE GREATER GOOD OF SOCIETY”: FIVE REMARKABLE CAPE TOWN WOMEN

*

Gwynne Schrire

There are two well-known stereotypes of Jewish women - the first deserves to be valued above rubies, because she works her fingers to the bone supporting her husband.¹ Up before dawn, she toils till late in the night, planting vineyards with her hands, going to distant shops to buy food for the family and raw material to spin, weave and turn into clothes to sell. She is not afraid of the snow for her family because she dresses them in scarlet. Why scarlet, not blue or green? Because of a mistake in the original translation. In Ugaritic the word, translated as ‘scarlet’, is a special form of the number TWO meaning the children are covered in double layers of clothing.² And what about her husband whom she supports from her earnings? Well, he praises her efforts and spends his days sitting at the gate chatting to the elders of the community.

The second portrays the woman who, when her young son boasts that he has been given a part in the school play as the Jewish husband instructs him to tell that teacher he wants a speaking part!

However such stereotypes ignore the many other women who labour to make the world a better place for their family and for society. South African society has problems aplenty - racism, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, gender abuse, and environment. These other women are quiet heroes, who seeing a need, decided with quiet determination to do something about it, often against considerable opposition and frequently at their own expense.

Warning: this article has a guaranteed *feriebel* potential because for every one selected, space has prevented the mention of another dozen of equal worth.

PAM HERR

“When I started my own business it was there for the greater good of Cape Town”.

Gwynne Schrire, a veteran contributor to Jewish Affairs and long-serving member of its editorial board, is Deputy Director of the Cape Council, SA Jewish Board of Deputies. She has written, co-written and edited numerous books on local Jewish and Cape Town history.



Working in Johannesburg for the Chamber of Commerce during the apartheid years, Pam Herr organised workshops for business men, including workshop on chapters in an importer’s manual she edited. The Johannesburg whites-only technikon asked permission to run a course based on the book. She refused.

“They all had a go at me and I said ‘You can do what you like but unless the technikon is going to be an open society, it is no deal.’ It took an Act of Parliament to enable the technikon to include non-white students. That was all because I said this is a stupid system and you are not going to get me to move.”

In 1981 Pam wanted to know what Soweto was like: “And if I wanted to do this then so would a whole lot of others so I organised a permit from the West Rand Bantu Administration Board for ‘Pam Herr and 60 business men’. My boss thought I was nuts.”

Pam designed township tours to introduce white businessmen to black businessmen while enabling them to see the apartheid realities hidden from view. When she moved to Cape Town and the Chamber of Industries, she wanted to do the same thing (“I was new to Cape Town. I wanted to see the Cape Flats. I wanted to know about other people and what they were doing.”)

Her boss refused and when she persisted,

he called in the army:

“We went off through the townships with sixty of Cape Town’s elite in this bus followed by a casspir. But if that was the only way I could get these white people into the township, then that was how I would have to do it. It was all business oriented. On the way they would see how people lived. I thought this was G-d working through me. He has got to change these people so this is what I had to do. All of a sudden they would stop talking and just start looking around them. The tour guide and I would look at each other and smile.

The tours were monthly – the army only came once. The casspir got stuck in the sand and those three-piece pinstriped businessmen had to get out of the bus to push it.

Later, Pam opened her own business, organising talks and tours and joined the CT Chamber of Commerce. Every month she would take businessmen on a 60-seater bus tour with a banner saying ‘Journey to the Cape Flats World of Business’. At each stop they would be told to pick a shop related to them and talk to the shopkeepers. She would tell the shopkeeper, “We are not going to improve your business or his unless the two of you talk.” People would say that their lives were never the same after one of her trips.

When executives from a clothing chain went on their tour, they asked to see what the shacks looked like. Pam refused.

“I said we can walk around but I am not showing you inside but they asked an old man if they could look inside his shack. I just gasped.

‘Yes’ said the old man, ‘but the baby is asleep. It is only one room’.

In and out they went, and they were dumbstruck. I said: ‘Ask him where the nearest toilet is. Ask him where the bus stop is. Ask him how many people live in this shack, and what time do they leave for work in the morning. Have members of your staff ever arrived for work late? Now are you surprised? You have got to start a housing policy, so that you can get decent houses for your staff. Now you can see for yourselves. They stood around me, knee deep in the sand and looked down at their shoes.’”

Prior to 1994, Pam went to see Tony Yengeni and offered to run workshops for the ANC to enable the business community and the ANC to get to know one another. At her *ANC Western Cape Forums* a panel of speakers including the likes of Trevor Manuel,

Pallo Jordan and Joe Slovo would discuss different topics and take questions followed by cocktails where they could make contacts. She started popular monthly breakfasts for white business people at the Yellow Door jazz club in Gugulethu and would include local people looking for business or employment opportunities.

When her husband died, she could no longer manage the business on her own and moved into a retirement village. There she discovered another form of discrimination – exploited workers. The gardeners were about to be retrenched. She called in a friend, a trade unionist, and paid their joining fees:

“Then the gardeners were members of the union. The carers and others joined up too. We were too late to save the cleaning staff and the catering staff - they had already retrenched and outsourced them, but the others received letters of appointment, their pay was doubled and they received bonuses after ten years.”

For a break she took a room in a seaside hotel for seniors: “I met the staff - I have never met a bunch of people who worked so hard. They never got a break. They just worked. I asked how much they earned. That was not OK.”

So Pam invited the trade unionist and his wife to be her guests for Saturday lunch. They came, chatted with the waitress, and were equally appalled. The upshot was that she helped the staff fill in the union forms, paid their joining fees, and after a bitter fight with the recalcitrant manager, the staff got letters of appointment, their salaries were tripled, they were given a lunch hour and lunch.

Since then the trade unionist has been unionising the retirement villages with similar results and Pam Herr has paid all the joining fees. She says that what is not right must be put right, that she is doing what G-d wants her to do and that it is for the greater good of society.

HELEN LIEBERMAN

“I could have looked at those townships and run away for life. But I couldn’t accept my country was like that. I had to try and do something to help. The biggest gift you can give people is the feeling of self-worth and the capacity to look after themselves.”³

As a young speech therapist at Groote Schuur Hospital in 1963, Helen Lieberman was upset when she found the baby she had been treating had been sent home prematurely. She waited in her car until she saw the nurse



leave after her shift and asked her to get in her car. “You don’t understand the trouble you and I are getting into”, the nurse told Helen as they drove to Langa.

“It was just horrific. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing; I thought I was looking into what was hell. There was squalor, poverty and fear. It was so overwhelming and terrible. I couldn’t imagine this existed in my own country and knew I could not live and watch it happening, without trying to help. At least now I can face myself having tried to do something about it.”

Helen took the baby back to the hospital and returned to Langa the next day. She saw many needs but realised that helping individuals would not be enough; centres were needed where people could learn skills and improve their situations themselves. And so this amazing modest woman went on to change the lives of hundreds of thousands.

She taught them to sew and make clothes and black cloth dolls. One woman asked her if she had noticed the state of the children - Helen mobilised the community to build the first pre-school. Another wanted a school - she knew twenty women who could teach with her as the principal. For the next five years, Helen came to the makeshift school every Saturday and worked with them. Then she became aware of the plight of the elderly and arranged with the community to bring them together and give them soup - this developed into Senior Clubs.

The police became suspicious of this white woman walking around Langa without a permit. Was she an informer or engaged in subversive activities? Helen was often arrested. When the community spotted the

police car, they would rush her out of the back door into another shack or hide her in the bushes. Helen remembers sitting in police vans, cuddling a little baby. The Jewish Board of Deputies at that time regarded her as a trouble maker.

By the 1970s, with her guidance, the community had started taking orphaned children into their homes. Peer support groups, care centres, food gardens and programmes for the blind, the disabled and the youth had been set up. In the 1980s informal schools had been started in several townships and their work began to spread, to Mossel Bay, George, Cradock and Johannesburg.

In 1989, Helen assembled 3000 people in the Langa Stadium. There she suggested that they establish an official NGO to improve the lives in their community and, in 1992, Ikamva Labantu - “The Future of the Nation” - was born.⁴ Today, it is one of the largest NGOs in South Africa - 140 principals and practitioners enrol in early childhood development training yearly, 2000 seniors attend nineteen clubs, 1321 pre-schoolers receive deworming treatment and 150 at-risk children benefit from academic support programmes. There are multipurpose service centres for children, youth, and adults to empower the most vulnerable populations, the disabled, the blind and elderly, day-care for pre-schoolers, economic empowerment initiative for seniors and business initiatives for working adults.⁵ It employs social workers, occupational therapists, community fieldworkers, nurses and teams of volunteers and raises vast sums of money all over the world to help disadvantaged people in South Africa.⁶ Says Helen,

“Had I known what it would grow into, I would never have started it! It is now a monster, it consumes everybody’s lives. I could not have done it without the input and the caring of so many ordinary, decent human beings. For this is very much a community run and owned organisation. That has been the common thread which has run right through the whole idea. You can’t do this without the support of community leaders and the local people. They have bought into this and they want to volunteer their time and services. Charity is the worst thing; you destroy people because you don’t give them the ability to be self-sufficient. My biggest achievement is when I hear people say they don’t need our organisation anymore.”

An extraordinary woman, Helen Lieberman is still actively involved in the organisation she founded: “I wake up in the morning and I want to be there.”⁷

MARLENE SILBERT

“We need to learn to live together to promote respect, empathy, social cohesion, reconciliation and social activism”.



When Marlene Silbert retired as Education Director of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre (CTHC),⁸ she agreed to serve on the committee of the Cape Town Interfaith Initiative along with the writer of this article. She has had a life-long commitment to human rights activism including serving as a safe house for ANC activists on the run from the police during the apartheid era.⁹

“It all started after a meeting early in 2011 with Chris Chivers, the Canon Chancellor of the Blackburn Cathedral, UK.¹⁰ He had heard of a human rights and diversity training programme I had developed at the CTHC called, *‘Learning to Live Together – We can make a difference’*.¹¹ He asked me to introduce a similar programme in the schools in Blackburn, a divided city with little contact between the religious groups.”¹²

Canon Chivers offered to raise funds to cover the costs of flights and accommodation to twin learners from Cape Town with their peers in Blackburn and Liverpool to teach the British youth that it was possible for people of different backgrounds to relate to each other. Marlene agreed and developed a two-year programme for learners from different religions, faiths, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds from five schools in diverse geographic locations. Each principal selected a teacher and three pupils who had demonstrated distinct leadership potential. The pupils also had to commit to introducing extra-mural clubs and societies within their school,

and to twin with other schools. During the second year of the programme the pupils go to Gugulethu one afternoon a week and, in partnership with the Amy Biehl Foundation, tutor disadvantaged young learners in maths and numeracy or language and literacy.

“Within our new South Africa we are beginning to live closer together and our lives have become interwoven, both nationally and internationally, yet we still seem to be driven apart. We constantly encounter people whose religions, cultures, ideas and ideals are unlike ours. Religion, in particular, continues to have a powerful presence because of its impact on our identity, and this can be divisive and create an ‘us’ and a ‘them.’”

The programme, now named the Marlene Silbert Youth Interfaith Intercultural Programme, creates an opportunity for the learners to engage in dialogue with peers from different backgrounds, sensitises them to their own prejudices and instils an appreciation of the value of diversity while breaking down stereotypes. It has exceeded all expectations. The pupils had bonded warmly, remarking that it had been an enriching life-changing experience as they had learnt so much both about themselves and each other. During the July holidays the learners were flown to England for a week, twinning with 15 U.K. learners who were also selected from diverse backgrounds who then returned to Cape Town with them for a further Cape Town experience with local funding raised by Marlene.¹³ After three years Blackburn stopped the funding but by this time the programme had developed a life of its own. More and more schools wanted to join as they could see the difference it had made in the lives of their learners.

“I believe that we need to speak and to listen, sharing views, even when they differ from our own. We need to make space for the beliefs of the other. We need to respect the dignity of those who are not like us. We need to be open to changing our perspectives, to understand and be understood across the boundaries of difference. We need to learn to live and work together in our complex and dependent society.”

By now about 300 learners have participated in the course and the effect on the schools and the participants has been remarkable. Marlene did not realise that she would be busier in retirement than she was at the CTHC. From the initial three children from five schools, the courses now consist of 38

learners from nine schools. She cannot keep up with the demand and has had to take on fellow co-ordinators.

ROLENE MILLER

Don't make me out to be a hero. I just realised that there were no services for abused women in the underprivileged areas. It was most often the songs of the heart that connected us and helped us create the beautiful MOSAIC that we envisioned.¹⁴



Rolene Miller, a social worker, remedial teacher and Lifeline counsellor, was working at Ikamva Labantu with her friend Helen Lieberman when she began connecting with women from disadvantaged communities. Many, she realised, were abused and desperately needed help. They did not know where to go or who could assist them. They needed to be empowered and educated about abuse and domestic violence so that they would know their rights, and how to access them.

“As a white Jewish woman I realised that I wanted to repay the privileges that I had experienced under the apartheid system. I saw gender abuse as a crisis. I wanted to work with women who suffered from abuse and who had no recourse to free services to help them. There were no organisations that focused on abuse. It bothered me that women in disadvantaged communities had to pay other organisations for services on a sliding scale. I felt that something should be freely provided for them.”

Having identified this need, Rolene decided to do something about it. As she had the tools and skills to make a difference, she used her own funds to start training grassroots community women, giving them tools to

connect with and help abused women. In 1993, she registered MOSAIC Training Services and Healing Centre¹⁵ and set about counselling, running workshops and educating about gender based violence. As she wanted to reach people within their own communities, she visited hospitals, clinics, schools, churches and community meetings. She and psychologist Tammy Shaffer then compiled a course and in 1994 started training 28 women from targeted areas in social work skills. They developed a unique methodology of connectedness and empowerment and to date Mosaic is a forerunner in its field.

Four years later the Department of Social Development gave her a grant.

“I was ecstatic because we had nothing before. When I started training the second group of community workers we were bankrupt. We were always two months away from bankruptcy. As much as I was an insider as a woman, I was also an outsider as I couldn't speak Xhosa and my Afrikaans was poor. Yet, the women who I trained seemed to transcend our differences and we connected on levels that words cannot express.”

These community workers shared with their abused clients similar backgrounds, stories and languages and with the training Rolene provided trained, healed, supported and helped abused women to change their lives for the better.

In 1999, Mosaic became the first organisation in the Western Cape to start working with domestic violence complaints directly at the courts. A major problem at court was that there was no one who could speak Xhosa to the women seeking Protection Orders. The technicalities and jargon of the Protection Orders were in English which the abused women did not understand. So Mosaic's community workers translated the paper work for them and helped to write their affidavits.

It was not long before fourteen magistrates in the Western Cape and two in Gauteng asked them to set up Mosaic Court Support Desks in their courts. Mosaic also runs courses for the clerks of the court.

“I believe that Mosaic is a story of growth and personal achievements, of survival against great odds. It's about miracles and the lessons that we learnt from them. It's about our huge love and trust in G-d. It's about us healing ourselves before we can heal others. Mostly, it's about the excitement and wonder of Women Power! Change will only come about when women who have had enough abuse will want to change and make a

difference! Only then will abuse stop and will Mosaic's mission be achieved."

Mosaic's community workers have taken the skills Rolene has provided to abused women in 33 communities. Today Mosaic has seventy members of staff, 42 have qualified as dedicated court workers and many thousands of women who were abused by gender, by apartheid, by patriarchy and by culture have been empowered. All because one dedicated woman realised that there were no organisations to help abused woman and decided to do something about it.¹⁶

KERRY HOFFMAN

Something needs to be done for the homeless. We must be there for each other. I take pride in what I am doing for these people and I'm passionate about making things a little better for them.



One day in 2014, Kerry Hoffman was greeted with such a warm smile from a homeless person on the street that she felt an immediate connection and decided to reach out in return. One cold winter day, she and her mother cooked three pots of soup, made many sandwiches and went off to the entrance of Cape Town's Government Avenue, a popular gathering place.

Kerry parked her car on the pavement, put on some jazz music, opened the trunk, and waited. It was not long before the first curious street person came by. The news spread and soon 150 polystyrene cups of soup and umpteen sandwiches had vanished with warm thanks and grateful appreciation from the hungry homeless, nearly 1000 of who sleep rough on the streets of Cape Town and the City Bowl.

Kerry was moved by the need, as well as by the degree of friendliness, kindness and co-operation she found among the street people.

These were people who had lost everything - jobs, homes, self-worth and dignity. This led to a vision that such gestures could bring about positive change in an increasingly negative space, and an acknowledgement, quoting Rabbi Isadore Twersky, that indigents remain dignified individuals with their own needs and drives, their own sensibilities and rights, strengths and weaknesses.¹⁷

Kerry committed herself to do something to restore their dignity. *Tzedaka* means justice - Judaism does not consider it is just that some people are rich, and others poor, that some people have plenty while others go hungry.

Kerry's friends began joining her, and brought their children along and by June 2014, Kerry had formed Souper Troopers.¹⁸ Soon her deliveries of soup and sandwiches had become regular keenly anticipated monthly events and services always run together with people on the street - a core group of loyal volunteers - in the Souper Troopers ethos of Dignity, Love, and Respect. These Souper Troopers events provide homeless people some dignity and attention and an opportunity to socialise in an environment of mutual respect.

In early 2017, Kerry was joined by Caryn Gootkin. They registered Souper Troopers as an NPO and are in the process of registering it as a PBO as well,¹⁹ with the aim of restoring dignity to the homeless and marginalised and reintegrating them into society. At one time they operated out of the Service Dining Rooms²⁰ before moving to the Carpenter's Shop.²¹

From hot soup on a cold day Souper Troopers, with the help of friends, volunteers and corporates has expanded into monthly 'socials'. More than 500 attend each event, where they enjoy food, music, entertainment and games - even celebrating their birthday parties. They help in the kitchen, cut each other's hair and clean up afterwards. Before Cape Town developed a water problem, mobile showers were an additional treat.

Corporates have come on board with donations of fruit and essential toiletries and many community members drop off clothing for distribution and a pop up shop. They run a customised Salesforce CRM database containing more than one thousand people's names and which profiles and tracks each person's development.

They are fund raising for a permanent central and easy to access human hub that will help to reintegrate them into society, with a Souper Café, a Souper Market, a Souper Salon and a Souper Style outlet to generate income for both the project and the currently unemployed troops and they will partner with corporates looking for staff and put the Troops in touch with the necessary

social and administrative services.

“I started this for myself. I shared whatever I had and three and a half years down the line, the guys on the street have become like family. I am delighted to see how Soupertroopers has grown from three pots of soup into an organisation designed to restore dignity and self-worth.”

Kerry believes that it is up to her generation to continue the legacy of previous women who were trailblazers in providing assistance to the disadvantaged. She sees nothing unusual in what she has done: “We all have a story. It is up to each one of us as human beings to help each other. We can create meaningful change through small acts of kindness. Together we are the change.”

Once again, it takes just one woman, who sees a need and who chooses to step in to make a positive change in people’s lives. The price of these women is definitely above rubies.

In November 2014, Gina Flash launched the Mensch Network as a platform to support Jewish social change-makers working in non-profits and social enterprises across the country in Cape Town and Johannesburg. It facilitates a network of approximately 100 Jewish social change-makers, mostly women and including Helen Lieberman, Rolene Miller and Kerry Hoffman.²²

NOTES

- 1 *Proverbs* 31:2.
- 2 Driver, GR, *Canaanite Myths and Legends, Old Testament Studies, III, T.&T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1956* & Smith, M S, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1-1.2*, Brill, 1994 p443
- 3 The information in this section was culled from: www.ikamva.org; <https://capechameleon.co.za/tag/helen-lieberman/> J 24 January, 2016; Brill, P, ‘I thought I was looking into what was hell’, *The Independent*, 3/6/2009. www.ikamva.org.za
- 4 In Gugulethu alone, they found 50-100 blind people who, under the organisation’s care and assistance, have become qualified aromatherapists. The qualifying course was specially modified for blind people. Another programme, taught computer literacy. Through Ikamva Labantu’s programmes, some of their former charges have qualified as lawyers and social workers.
- 6 Since then Ikamva Labantu has built or upgraded over 100 pre-schools, established its first seniors club, Noluthando 1, a Rainbow Centre in Gugulethu that houses a Senior Club, a pre-school and their Afterschool Programmes. In the 2000s they built two additional centres in Khayelitsha – their Early Childhood Development Centre, their Enkhululekweni Wellness Centre and their model pre-school, Kwakhanya, a practical training-ground for township practitioners and principals and they opened the Ikamva Labantu Family Centre housed in their ECD

centre.

- 7 In 2017 the French government awarded her the highest honour that France can bestow on a foreign citizen, Officier de la Légion d’Honneur “in recognition of her lifelong commitment to the eradication of poverty, injustice and human misery”. Other honours include an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Notre Dame, the 2008 Roger E Joseph Prize of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion at Temple Emanuel, a member of the Order of the Disa by the Western Cape Government, the SAJBD Human Rights Award and was named “Citizen of the Year” for 1994 by the Lions Mult pie District 410.
- 8 Marlene Silbert was the founding Education Director of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre and former National Director of the SA Holocaust Foundation.
- 9 <http://capeinterfaith.org.za/for-real-peace-you-need-real-dialogue-interfaith-intercultural-school-twinning-and-exchange-programme/>
- 10 Formerly vicar of Cape Town’s St Georges Cathedral.
- 11 Honorary advisor to the project was Jordan’s HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal. Those involved included an Argentinean Nobel Peace prize laureate, people from Iran (!), Israel, Germany, India, Albania, USA, Saudi Arabia, Norway, Switzerland, Sri Lanka etc and from Africa a Bishop from Tanzania and Marlene .
- 12 *Learning to Live Together” An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education* is a book endorsed by UNESCO and UNICEF for children and youth produced by Marlene working with others on the Interfaith Council on Ethics Education for Children, the Global Network of Religions for Children and the Arigatou Foundation of Japan in 2008.
- 13 They visited different places of worship and interacted with religious leaders, thereafter returning to Cape Town with their English twins and visiting places like the District Six Museum, Holocaust Centre, Robben Island and a wine farm.
- 14 Schneider, M, ‘Miller; Uplifting those whose lives are in pieces’, *SA Jewish Report*, 30/11/2017.
- 15 MOSAIC is symbolic for abused women putting the broken pieces of their lives together.
- 16 Rolene has won several awards including the Rotary International’s Paul Harris Award and has been nominated for the One Thousand Women for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015. In 2017 Michael Bagraim, MP, presented her and Mosaic to the Members of Parliament.
- 17 Twersky, Isadore, “Some aspects of the Jewish attitude towards the welfare State” In *Poor Jews: An American Awakening*, edited by Naomi Levine and Martin Hochbaum, p194.
- 18 www.soupertroopers.org.facebook.com/soupertroopers; info@soupertroopers.org.
- 19 It is also a Level 1 BBBEE contributor.
- 20 The Service Dining Rooms have been providing hot lunches to the vulnerable in Cape Town since 1935. servicediningrooms.org.za/
- 21 The Carpenters Shop provides services for the homeless thecarpentersshop.org.za
- 22 <http://mensch.org.za/>; <https://www.facebook.com/mensch.org.za/> The Mensch Network initiative was originally launched, under Flash’s direction, by the SAJBD Cape Council.

ARTICLES, THESES & BOOKS PERTAINING TO SA JEWRY AND JEWISH STUDIES, 2014-2017

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Juan-Paul Burke

At the end of 2016, I was asked to compile a bibliography of articles, books and theses as pertain to South African Jewry and Jewish Studies. I knew a few academics writing in the field, but having systematically commenced my searches, I was pleasantly surprised to realize just how much is being written on a variety of topics to do with South African Jewry and Jewish Studies around the country and even further afield.

It was not always obvious what should be included in this bibliography but I have applied a few principles as guidelines. Anything from local community publications has been excluded as it goes without saying that these will be filled with South African Jewish content. Therefore you will find nothing in this listing from *Jewish Affairs*, *SA-SIG Newsletter*, *Jewish Report*, *CJC*, *Hashalom*, *Jewish Life*, *Jewish Tradition*, *Perspective* etc. Also excluded are non-Jewish newspapers and magazines and texts where the authors are Jewish but write about something not related to local Jewry or Jewish Studies.

I have included academic, popular and religious texts found in academic journals, books or as theses. In general, unpublished papers presented at conferences are not listed, but an exception has been made with one that I felt was significant enough to include to highlight what research is being done.

This listing cannot be claimed to be comprehensive and it is more than likely that certain items have been missed. It is intended that these be listed in a letter to the editor for the next edition of *Jewish Affairs*. I appeal to readers to inform me of any edits or suggestions of additions to the bibliography (Email: paysach12@gmail.com).

My thanks to Professor Emeritus Milton Shain, who originally asked me to compile such a bibliography. I have simply been building on that original bibliography ever since and thought it worth sharing the more

recent portion of it, being texts from the last four years, with a wider audience who may appreciate it. Thanks also to all those who provided information as to their publications so that I could include them.

My reference style is based on UCT author-date. The slight variance is for links at the end of a reference where I have dropped "Available:" before the link and the date accessed at the end. Several subjects are represented including education, history, antisemitism, holocaust, politics, literature, music, religion, business, genealogy and Yiddish.

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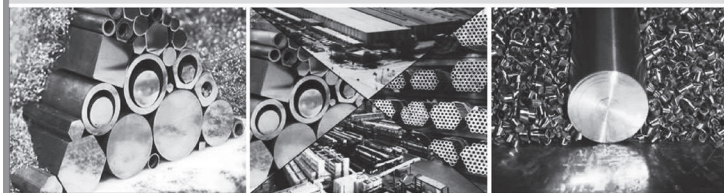
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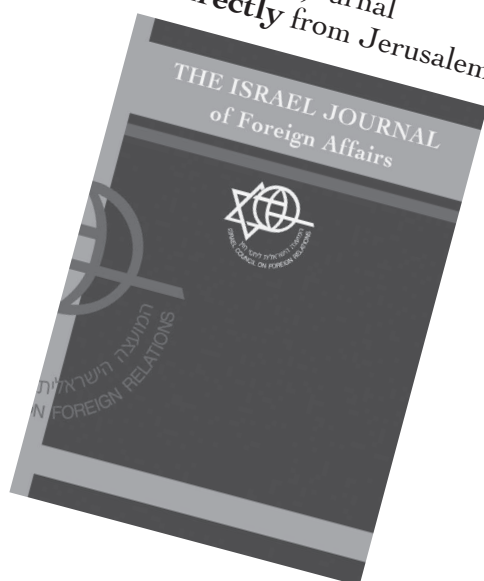
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CHILD OF THE CONCENTRATION CAMP

(Part III)

*

Don Krausz

Shortly after our arrival in Ravensbruck, a prisoner called Riva Fridova approached my mother. Riva was a *Mishling*, a person who was half Jewish, and the red triangle that she wore above her prison number meant that she was political, in her case a communist. Her husband had been executed. She told my mother that the Czech women had influential jobs and would try and help us where possible.

In the months that followed, Riva and my mother kept in touch and became friends. We would be advised of anything happening that concerned our group and of the latest war news. One of the Czech women worked at the bathhouse; it was arranged that my mother could draw a bucket of hot water occasionally, so that Irene could have a proper wash. When I developed boils, a Czech doctor would arrive at my barrack with dressings hidden in her bosom. I obviously did not present myself to the SS doctor at casualty because of the risks involved. Only once did an SS guard assist in my recovery, and that was when I developed an abscess on my backside and could not march properly. The kick that this man gave me burst the abscess and it began to heal.

The Czechs were not the only group that distinguished itself in Ravensbruck. There were several barracks of female Russian prisoners of war. They seemed fearless and would tolerate no ill-treatment from anyone, irrespective of punishments. Unlike the Western powers, the Russians used their women as combat soldiers and these women were tough. When the 1000 bomber raids came over and nobody was allowed out of the barracks, they would run out, wave to the planes and cheer. Apart from the Czechs they were also the only ones who took an active interest in us children.

I shall never forget how they would find out when a small child had a birthday. Then they would somehow get the ingredients, and present us each with a tart consisting of a one and a half inch cube of bread wrapped up in silver paper and with a decoration in jam on top. Then we would be invited to a party in their barrack, where they would dance and sing their Red Army songs. Not much by present standards, but in that hell of starvation, murder, disease, abuse, fear and hatred, these incidents stood out like a light from heaven.

I remember seeing an elderly American woman with white hair in our barrack. When I rejoined my mother in England after the war she told me a remarkable story about her. She had married a French count, thus becoming a countess, and lived in an old chalet overlooking the French coast. The chalet had a space between the ceiling of one room and the floor of the room above it which could be used to hide people. It could be accessed by lifting a large stone slab in the floor of the upper room.

The countess befriended my English mother and told her a most remarkable story. She had been part of a chain of the French resistance that used to smuggle escaped POWs, downed Allied airmen and others to the coast, where they could be picked up by British warships. The German army was stationed in a nearby village which was connected to the chalet by a single road. Any vehicles that were heading for the chalet could be viewed long before their arrival.

The countess told how at times there were some twenty individuals hidden in her chalet awaiting their rendezvous with a Motor Torpedo Boat or submarine. A lookout was always kept for prowling patrols or the periodic arrival of German officers on a tour of inspection. Then the 'guests' would be warned to get into their hidey hole as a matter of urgency.

Upon my arrival in England after the war I would see Allied war films that usually showed how the Allies got the better of the Nazis because the latter were downright stupid. This story presents a different picture. The Wehrmacht must have had an inkling that the

Don Krausz has served as the chairman of the Association of Holocaust Survivors in Johannesburg (She'erith Hapleitah) since 1985. Over the past three decades, he has spoken to thousands of South Africans, Jewish and non-Jewish, including addressing many school groups, on his experiences during the Holocaust.

chalet played a role for the resistance. From time to time German officers would pay a visit, always being most courteous and polite, and being received with the same decorum. There would be pleasant conversation, food and drink, and then the countess would escort them around the premises according to their wish.

Now my mother told me this story within months of the end of the war and so I can assume that her memory was still sharp. But the details of the story are so unbelievable that I would have had my doubts for if true it showed that the Germans were very canny. In touring the chalet the Germans also entered the room below which the 'guests' were hidden and then proceeded further. The countess always accompanied them, but on one occasion she excused herself for reasons of her own and returned the way she had come. Entering the room where the hiding place was she noticed a folded piece of paper on the floor. Written on it was a message in English stating that if she was in any danger 'they' would give themselves up. Her first reaction was to destroy this incriminating note. Then she realized that her guests were unable to exit their hiding place without assistance. That note must have been dropped there by the Germans! Had they found the note missing there would have been awkward questions. She carefully replaced it on the floor where she had found it.

Not long thereafter she was arrested and interrogated her. The chalet was closed down. Although she claimed not to have revealed anything under interrogation she was sent to Ravensbruck under the German '*Nacht und Nebel*' (Night and Fog) programme for neutralizing people that were under suspicion.

After her liberation she returned to the USA, and was killed in a car accident.

Sometimes when I speak at schools, the children ask me about religion in the camps. One of the women in our group, a Mrs Laufer, was very orthodox; she was the only one who took the trouble to work out approximately when the Jewish religious festivals were due. When it was Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur she would say the required prayers from memory and I believe that she fasted on the latter day. There may be something to this, for she was sent to Bergen Belsen with three tiny children and they all survived, as did her husband. Bergen Belsen was the camp where people succumbed in their tens of thousands to typhus and tuberculosis.

Mrs. Laufer and her husband had been friends of my parents, and I visited her in Holland after the war. She told me that one of her more horrible experiences in Bergen

Belsen was the awareness that she was able to walk over the corpses of babies without feeling any emotion. As stated, she had three children of her own there at the time, the oldest being about four years old.

Bergen Belsen brings back another story. After the war I met a film producer who had been one of the British soldiers that liberated the camp. Most of us will have seen the films of the mass graves into which the 17000 corpses found in that camp were bulldozed. The inhabitants of the nearby town were brought in by the British to view what had been found and to witness the mass burials. Many seemed horrified.

The war was not over yet and that soldier continued fighting elsewhere. After the war he returned to Britain for demobilization and traveled via Belsen. He told me that he saw that the locals had planted cabbages on the mass graves, each of which held up to 5000 victims.

Then there were the Polish women in our barrack. They distinguished themselves by two strong beliefs: they were deeply religious and viciously antisemitic. We had the Polish nobility there, as well as the peasant classes, and apart from their mode of expression, their attitude to us Jewish children was the same. Never a smile, never a kind word or a pat on the head, as is normal behaviour with children.

There was a shower room in Ravensbruck. About every six months we would all be marched off, told to strip and allowed to take a hot shower lasting five minutes, boys and women all together. We would have to share one shower with one or two women, but so great was the enjoyment of this luxury that nobody minded. I should mention though that ever since Ravensbruck I have had a horror of anorexic women. It was also the first time that I saw my mother naked. Other occasions were when there was a medical inspection by SS doctors. One of our group limped as a result of polio. The 'doctor' asked her why she was crippled and on being told the reason commented that all Jews were cripples.

These medical and racial experts also had a lot of difficulty with my sister Irene who was blond, blue eyed and very beautiful. She did not conform to their textbook description of what a Jew should look like. They first tried to get my mother to admit that this was not her natural child. Then they tried to persuade her to give Irene up for adoption, as she would obviously be better off elsewhere. The amazing thing is that they even asked. When my mother refused, they had another close look at Irene and decided that her ears were Jewish after all. I have an idea that my mother kept Irene with her because she

would rather have the child take her chances as a Jew in a concentration camp than be brought up as a Nazi by those murderers. Maybe her action was just instinctive.

And what was the effect of this on Irene? Today she remembers very little of what she experienced in the camps, yet must have been aware of the unusual attention that she received while her racial purity was investigated. She may well remember overhearing the discussion about her "Jewish ears." It was only about fifty years after the war that she was made aware of this episode and then understood why she had always insisted even as an adult on having a hairstyle that completely covered her ears.

Ravensbruck was a centre for Nazi medical experiments. We would see women with scars on their lower limbs about one inch wide and about a foot long. We were told that they had been subjected to bone grafting experiments against their will. They had probably been fed properly while the healing process lasted, but I heard that eventually nearly all were executed.

The barracks, and we ourselves, were infested with lice and fleas. Apart from the discomfort, lice cause typhus while infected fleas carry bubonic plague. On Sundays we did not work and would spend our time sitting in the sun destroying this vermin. I would kill about 100 at a time and the following Sunday there would be another 100 to get rid of, despite my daily washing from head to toe. Actually this infestation was not surprising. Our mattresses and blankets were crawling with vermin and we slept five to a space of 120 cm, body to body, head to toe.

I had managed to acquire felt slippers in the camp and they were full of fleas that I could not reach. So one Sunday I borrowed a bucket, filled it with water and soaked those slippers at the bottom of the bucket for half an hour. Then I put the slippers in the sun to dry, and as they dried, the fleas revived. It seems that one can't drown a flea.

From time to time the Germans would order an *Entlausung*, a delousing. We would have all our clothing taken from us, clean uniforms would be brought, and we would be packed like sardines into one room for a whole night while our barracks and old clothes would be fumigated. The problem was to be able to sleep during that night. You would lie on the shoulder or in the lap of the next person, sleep for a while and then change places. I arranged that I would put my head in the lap of a dark-haired, emaciated young girl with a pale pretty face, who sat alongside me. When next I opened my eyes it was daylight; she had sat there all night and let me sleep. Eventually we

would get our clothing back again.

We did not stay in Barrack 23 for long. With much trepidation we were transferred to another barrack run by a German woman called Kate Peters. Survival in concentration camps depended to some extent on the barrack leaders, who were usually viciously antisemitic. In the Ravensbruck Camp for Women 50 000 women died over a period of some six years and that was without there being a gas chamber until early 1945. We were lucky in finding ourselves with barrack leaders who were not Nazis or psychopaths.

Kate Peters was unusual. She wore a red triangle, indicating that the reason for her imprisonment was political. She always gave us to understand that her family was anti-Nazi and that this caused her to be imprisoned. Possibly, she had been a Social Democrat.

Kate Peters looked like a goddess and behaved like one to us. A very tall, blond woman, she did not wear the camp uniform, but an all-enveloping gown which suited her statuesque good looks and Wagnerian appearance. She immediately began to care for our group of 80 Jews that included 20 children of which, at 13, I was the oldest. In contrast to many other inmates she behaved to us as a human being despite the stigma of our religion. She would get us to come to her private quarters, dance, and sing our Hebrew songs, after which she would hug and kiss us, also a rarity in that camp. When she learned that a young child had had a birthday without her knowledge she upbraided the mother as she would have arranged something special for that child. She also made sure that we got as much food as it was possible to obtain.

I believe that I owe my life to Kate Peters. After a three-week spell in the hospital with acute diarrhea during which period I was unable to eat, I returned to her barrack in a state of severe malnutrition. A member of our group screamed when she first saw me. By that time I had already turned 14, which would have necessitated my removal to the adjacent Men's camp where I would have had to perform heavy labour. The inability of doing this in a concentration camp usually carried a death sentence, especially for a Jew. I remember Kate Peters taking me by the hand like a small child and marching me to the camp administration, where she seemed to be on good terms with everyone, SS and inmate. There she arranged a three-month extension of transfer for me, during which period she and others fed me as much extra food as could be obtained.

After the war I met up with an aunt who had remained in the camp after I and subsequently my mother and sister were removed to other camps. She told me that

Kate Peters had eventually undergone a change of personality, lost her good looks and begun to beat young Jewish girls to death.

I was left with the question: Supposing I met her again, who would she be to me? My savior or a murderess?

This was not the only metamorphosis that I heard of. Not long after I left, my mother managed through Riva to have herself and Irene transferred to the nearby Siemens labour camp, where conditions were better. Someone had to keep an eye on the children and the Germans, in their wisdom appointed a woman with a green triangle, who was there because she had killed her mother with an axe. You can imagine the feelings of the mothers, yet nobody could have taken better care of those children than that murderess.

Two other inmates stand out in my memory. One was a lovely young German girl in our barrack whom I befriended and who told me that she had been put into the camp for not being accommodating enough to her Nazi boyfriend. Sometimes people were incarcerated to serve as hostages for the good behaviour of their family. She was a fervent admirer of Hitler and a product of the Hitler Jugend, the Nazi equivalent of the Scouts. She would tell me of the wonder of Hitler and all the miracles that he had performed for Germany. Once I asked her how she reconciled the concentration camp with her beloved Fuhrer, and she replied with innocent eyes that if he knew about this he would never allow it.

The other was a young French woman with whom I became friendly because we could both speak English. Her name was Jenny and was, I think, half Jewish. She had worked in England for British intelligence and been parachuted into France, only to find the Germans waiting for her at the landing ground. She told me earnestly that according to the Geneva Convention she was a prisoner of war and should not be held in a concentration camp. She also said that she had asked for an appointment with the camp commandant Fritz Suhren in order to point this out. It seems that eventually she did get her appointment; returning work parties told us that they had seen her hanged outside the camp.

This brings me to punishment. There was a building inside the camp surrounded by barbed wire and it was called the Bunker. We used to pass close to it on our way to *Appel*. It was the Gestapo interrogation centre, and dreadful screams were sometimes heard emanating from there. Sometimes in the morning as we marched to the parade ground one would see a woman clad in underwear only, who had been fastened to the barbed wire and left there for the night.

One last word about Ravensbruck Women's Camp. Although we children were not expected to work, on one occasion there was a blockage in the sewage system. We older boys were sent to dig it up, and I found myself working in raw sewage up to my knees.

Ravensbruck Men's Camp

In October 1944, after I turned fourteen, an eleven-year-old boy called Otto Kallus and I were transferred to the adjoining men's camp. Otto left behind his mother, a fine but frail looking woman, a brother called Rudi aged about nine and a little sister called Emmy. She was the child described earlier who had been in the Revier (from *Krankenrevier*, or "sick bay"), with typhus and had been smuggled out before an anticipated selection took place.

Once again there was sorrow but no visible tears. Our mothers gave us parcels with our belongings, embraced us and said good bye. Mrs Kallus made me promise to look after Otto. The men's camp joined onto the women's camp and so we walked there. Upon our arrival and having been given new numbers and had our heads shaven, we were put into a barrack housing about 300 German Gypsy men and children aged from four years to my age. Those Gypsies had come from Auschwitz, where hundreds of thousands of their race were gassed. With time more children were to join us, a French boy from the women's camp named Herbert Klein, and eventually a group of Czech boys aged from nine to seventeen, all Jews. We found a Gentile Polish boy there of my age who had half his arm missing and who was rather pleased to join up with us, even though he spoke Polish and rather poor German. Some months later a Polish speaking boy who had American papers joined us. In the months to come there would be more additions to our children's group.

The camp housed about 5000 people and was run by German criminals, who actually treated us quite fairly. The camp commander was an old army type, who could be quite decent as we were to find out. Most important, the food was much better. The soup was quite thick, contained potatoes and on Sundays pieces of meat. Otherwise the routine was not very different from the women's camp. Instead of a siren, we would be woken by a bugler who also blew "lights out" at night. Influence of the Wehrmacht camp commander, I suppose.

We also met up with an old acquaintance who had been with me in the women's camp, a Belgian boy named Jacques. He was about a year older than I and sexually



Gypsy prisoners, Belzec concentration camp, Poland

fully developed. He was not quite normal and my mother had had trouble with him. I remember giving him many a hiding for that reason. In the men's camp, he had become the pet of the guards, had his own very nice and clean uniform, and used to assist the guards in beating up old Jewish men as they arrived from other camps. I was worried that Jacques would make use of his new position to get even with me for the beatings I had given him, but he kept his distance.

The Gypsy boys, who far outnumbered us, lost no time in introducing themselves: they beat us, much to the amusement of their elders. Once again we were assigned our sleeping quarters, five to two beds. Herbert Klein slept with Otto, the Polish boy and me, and a Czech boy eventually joined us. Herbert had very few clothes and seemed unused to looking after himself. I gave him one of my jerseys, for which he was grateful, but not grateful enough to co-operate with us: he would not wash himself every day. The vermin problem was bad enough without this and I was quite harsh with him, refusing to let him join us in bed until he had performed his ablutions. He did not have much choice really; his only other option was to try to crawl in with the Gypsies, who would probably have kicked his teeth in. Otto and I still had the blankets that we had brought from Holland. Herbert used to stand at the foot of the bed and cry, but with time and some gentle encouragement he became as adept at survival techniques and foraging for food as I was.

We were sent out to work without delay. During the following months I worked outside the Siemens labour camp digging trenches for water and sewerage pipes, building roads and similar heavy work. The Germans used a very effective method of supervising our efficiency. If soil or rubble had to be moved they did not use wheelbarrows; instead we would stand in a long line, evenly spaced out, between the source and the destination of the soil and with long-handled spades pass the material from one to the other.

If the heap that you were moving became too big, then it meant that either you were working too slowly or the chap behind you was working too fast. In either case you would be beaten, usually with that six-foot spade, or kicked. So the work required a fine degree of co-operation between prisoners.

I remember an occasion, several months after we had arrived, when we were sent to work some distance from the camp. Nearby I noticed a forest of beech trees, so at the first unguarded moment I stole away to see whether there were any beechnuts to be found. I had in the meantime managed to find some pieces of fur, as I will describe later, and had made gloves similar to the ones that traffic cops wear. There were beechnuts and I lost no time in filling my gloves with them. Then, suddenly, I had a feeling that something was wrong. I looked up and saw Fritz Suhren, the commandant of the women's camp, walking on a path about 25 yards away. Luckily he was looking in the opposite direction. I dropped flat on the ground behind a tree and was fortunate not to be detected. Had I been found, a flogging would have been the least that I could have expected.

At one stage I was assigned alone to working in and cleaning a warehouse supervised by a crippled soldier of the Wehrmacht. The place was packed with suitcases and personal belongings of Jews and SS who had been at Westerbork. It was a strange experience, but I lost no time in seeing what I could find that would suit my purposes. On one occasion I had climbed right on top of the shelves to examine the contents of a suitcase when suddenly a quiet voice said, "What are you doing up there?" It was my supervisor. I made some excuse and hastily climbed down, soon to be transferred to my usual work party. I believe that I owe my life to that soldier; if he had chosen to pursue the matter I could have been hanged. At the age of 14? Eli Wiesel describes in harrowing detail the hanging of a six year old child that he witnessed.

From time to time goods trains would

be shunted into the siding at Ravensbruck. They came from the Death Camps, and were packed with possessions of people who had been sent there. We boys had to manhandle such railway trucks to a platform and help to offload them. Here again we would pinch whatever we could. The Gypsies would lay their hands on anything that glittered, such as costume jewelry, while I took fur, sewing materials, medical supplies, and once even a German medical book dating back to the previous century. Libraries were in short supply in concentration camps and I was only too delighted with my book. The Gypsies gave me the title "*Der Judendoktor*" and began to discuss their ailments with me.

These foraging expeditions were actually extremely dangerous. If one was caught stealing government property, as the Germans called all the things that they had stolen themselves, one would be severely punished and at the whim of an official could even be hanged. I was almost caught on two occasions. The first time we were marching back into the camp when suddenly two guards cordoned off a group of us and made us stand with our backs against a barrack wall. They then assigned one of the Gypsies to search us. I suspect that they didn't do the job themselves in case they caught lice. Each person had his pockets turned out and as things were found, he received a beating. These seldom killed anyone, but they had a cumulative effect and were very demoralizing. The boy fourth in line from me was examined and beaten, the third and the second ones as well. Then came my turn. The Gypsy put his hand into my overcoat pocket, felt the wool and cotton thread and the bandages there and told the guard: "This one has nothing". He was a Gypsy and therefore no friend of mine. I can only surmise that to a Gypsy my loot was valueless.

On the second occasion we were again lined up against a barrack wall. It was quite dark by that time. I had pieces of fur on me and articles of clothing. As the search approached me, I suddenly realized that I was standing with my back against a drainpipe. In the darkness I managed to stuff all my ill-gotten gains behind that pipe without being detected. Later that night I returned to retrieve them.

We were supervised by the guards and Capos (prisoners who had been put in charge of other prisoners). Mostly, the latter were not too bad; the war was obviously nearly over, this was a small camp where all the old hands knew each other, the camp commander was not a psychopath - it all helped. But a convalescent home it wasn't.

I became friendly with some of the old hands, criminals all, and some of the people

in the barrack. We would communicate in German and sometimes in English. They would tell me of the old days in that camp before the war and before Stalingrad put the writing on the wall. They told me how a Capo would be sent out with 200 men and instructed only to return with 198. How he did it was his concern. The favorite method was to tell a prisoner to take a walk towards the guards (*Postenkette*) that ringed every concentration camp and work party, and who would shoot to kill once one came within a certain range. A guard would be awarded with leave for every prisoner killed. Since its establishment, twenty thousand men had died in that little camp.

The barrack leaders would be murdering monsters, but there was retaliation. A Capo who overdid his elimination programme might be found with a spade cleaving his skull. A barrack leader might be found hanged.

One of the criminals that I became friendly with was a cripple nicknamed Hop-la-hop because of the way he walked. He wore a green triangle but a pink one (homosexual) would have been more appropriate, for he was always putting his arms around and hugging me close. My sex education was absolutely nil, and I knew even less about homosexuality, but I did know that I didn't need Hop-la-hop draping himself all over me. Still, he was an interesting source of information and occasionally some food.

Meanwhile, the German Gypsies were making the life of us Jewish boys an absolute misery. They were the scum of the earth, and as brutal to each other as they were to us. After the war I learned that they were abhorred also by Gypsies from neighboring countries. Many of them had been serving with the German army when somebody discovered that they were non-Aryans, whereupon they were stripped of their uniforms and sent to Auschwitz to be gassed. This did not seem to change their thinking much; as far as we Jews were concerned they were still good Nazis. The assaults, abuse and humiliation reached such a point that I was not prepared to tolerate it any longer and decided to talk to the barrack leader. This however was not so simple: one of the unwritten rules of a concentration camp was that a Jew keeps a very low profile. "You don't like the way we treat you here? You would be happier elsewhere, Auschwitz perhaps?" This was a possibility, not only for me, but also for the whole Jewish group. After all, if we meant trouble, even if through no fault of our own, then what did they need us for? Concentration camps were not established for the administration of justice.

But then again, what did we Jewish boys have to lose? This existence left no room

for self- respect. So one evening, when I had had more than my share of being beaten up, I knocked on the criminal shaven-headed barrack leader's door. I told my story and he asked me one question: "Are you the English boy?" I did not know of any other English-speaking boy so I said 'Yes'. He sent me back to the barrack. Later that evening he returned together with the *Lageralteste*, the head of all the prisoners in the camp, a severe looking man carrying a truncheon in his belt. That individual asked me to point out who had been assaulting us. I saw this as an invitation to my lynching and politely declined. The man screamed at me, repeating the question. I pointed out the worst culprit, who thereupon received a beating with the truncheon. After this the Gypsies left us alone, at least while we were in Ravensbruck.

It took some time before I was able to understand what had happened. One day a few Gypsies with whom I was on speaking terms came to tell me that there was an American boy in one of the barracks. Intrigued I accompanied them and found myself facing a tall, thin, very refined looking boy with almost girlish good looks. I addressed him in English. A look of fear crossed his face; he went white and did not answer me. I looked at his red triangle; on it was printed AM for American. One of the Gypsies started laughing: "He isn't American," he said. I quickly left, for unwittingly I had endangered this boy's life. Shortly after this the American boy came to our barrack where he was careful to avoid me. Our Polish boy soon joined him and they shared a bed. This poor chap was Polish with American papers.

What I think had happened was this: it was known that there was an American boy in the camp. I spoke English and was mistaken for him. The barrack leader and his superior, who must have had a lot to answer for, decided that if the English or Americans liberated the camp, it would do them no harm if I could put in a good word for them. And while I was in Ravensbruck this stood me in good stead.

The Gypsies were not quite finished with me though. One day a group of them came and told me that I had been selected to cut up the bread ration. I don't remember why I did not refuse, maybe I couldn't, but I was aware that it was a trap. What I did know was that this was one of the most dangerous jobs in the camp, something that was proved to me after the war in horrible fashion. The loaves in the Men's camp were shaped like our rye bread, tapered at the ends. Without a scale it is very difficult to cut such a loaf without the end pieces looking bigger, or every piece weighing the

same, and remember, I was dealing with very hungry, hostile, violent people. So I took the job, and made very sure that I kept the smallest looking piece for myself. Predictably, after the first division, the largest of those Gypsies rose from our table and tossed his ration at me: "What do you call this?" he said. "You can have mine" I told him and quickly exchanged the two pieces. And that was the end of the matter. Not long thereafter I was relieved of this task: It had not worked out as planned.

One day a *Muselman* came into our barrack, probably to beg for food. A *Muselman* was a prisoner who had become so emaciated and weak from starvation, that he could no longer work. They were skeletal and the lack of flesh on their bodies resulted in them always feeling cold. They usually walked around during the day wearing their blankets, which gave them the appearance of Bedouin, hence the name *Muselmanne*, Moslems. These people would spend their day in the camp scrounging and begging for food, and eventually would all be gathered and put on transport never to be seen again. The Gypsies promptly attacked this pathetic creature and beat him until he managed to escape.

As mentioned before, the Gypsy boys greatly outnumbered us and there was nothing that we Jewish boys could do about this assault. But when it was over, I went to speak to the leader of the Gypsy boys, a chap with protruding teeth, which gave him a wolfish look, and by the name of Menelo. I asked him if his father was still alive, and what his reaction would have been if we Jewish boys had ill-treated his father the way he and his young thugs had molested that *Muselman*. Menelo said that he would have been most upset and eventually agreed that what they had done was wrong. The following day that same *Muselman* came again into the barrack and the whole performance repeated itself. Once again I had been taught the separation between logic and emotion.

After the war Otto and I remained in touch. He also began to lecture in Germany where he was recognized by some Gypsy survivors and made an Honorary Gypsy. A few years ago Otto came to SA and brought me greetings from...Menelo.

I picked up a few Gypsy words: *Lourdo* meant guard, *Moulo* - death. Quite appropriate considering the circumstances.

After about three months in the Men's camp, Otto, Herbert and I were told that a visit had been arranged between our mothers and us in the adjoining Women's camp. This was highly irregular, and I am sure that Riva or Kate Peters must have had a hand therein.

We met in a building at some halfway point. I don't think that there were any gifts, there couldn't have been. All that the meeting really achieved was to show one another that we were still alive and what our condition was. Herbert's mother was pathetically grateful that he had received one of my jerseys. My mother told me after the war that she was shocked by the change in my demeanor. As far as I was concerned, as pleased as I was to see my mother again and to hear about my sister, the experience merely helped to accentuate the loneliness and desolation that I felt once my mother had left again.

At one stage we found ourselves in a barrack run by a German criminal with pedagogic ambitions. He decided that it was a crying shame that we youngsters were not going to school and decided to do something about this. So he got all us Jewish boys together and proceeded to instruct us. The Gypsies, he decided, were uneducable.

His first and only lesson I will never forget. He chose astronomy as his subject and began to tell us how the sun revolved around the earth. Some of the older Czech boys had received some schooling and one of them politely begged to differ. He received a terrible smack across his face, while the Block Alteste thundered: "You imbecile! Can't you use your eyes? Can't you see that the sun comes up in the morning and goes down in the evening?" But he never tried to teach us again.

Each barrack had a barrack towel – that's right, one towel for about 600 men. It was hardly a bath towel either, just a rag about 60cm square. I had the belief that washing was important and even in winter when the water supply was frozen, I would rub down with snow. I think that if nothing else it helped me to tolerate the cold better.

The Gypsies did not have any such notions; you could tell a Gypsy at a glance by the dark ring around his face, where he had washed it daily at the expense of the rest of his body. I used to wash myself when the others were occupied elsewhere, but on one occasion I was caught. The Gypsy boy who saw me ran screaming to the *Kindervater*, the Gypsy adult who was supposed to keep an eye on us. The child told him of the horror that he had witnessed. The *Kindervater* shouted, "You have the gall to dry your backside with the towel that we have to use for our faces?" and gave me a bad hiding. I suppose that he had a point.

One evening a German criminal with a pleasant face came into our barrack and announced that he wanted three boys to come and work for him in his cobbler shop. The Gypsies fell all over themselves,

shouting and gesticulating, but he refused to have anything to do with them. He picked a Ukrainian, a Czech boy and me and the following morning we reported for work.

The shoemaking shop was a pleasant, well-heated place and the shoemakers there, of all nationalities, were kind people. One received a good lunch of thick soup at midday, something that others most certainly did not get. But what did these skilled artisans, who were employed making jackboots for the SS, want with us? We soon found out.

Upon our arrival we were shown a room about four meters square and packed to the ceiling with shoes and boots of every type, size and description. These had been brought from death camps where their owners had long since been cremated. Our task consisted of cutting up these shoes to see if anything was hidden in them. Outside it was 28 degrees below zero, people were walking around in open wooden sandals and we were to cut up perfectly good shoes! We were told that if we found anything we would be rewarded. We were each given a leather shoemaker's apron and a cobbler's knife. It was easy work and looked as if it could last until the war ended. The working conditions were congenial, and I lost no time in persuading our boss to let me bring Otto in as well. I also selected a fine pair of boots for myself.

Otto and I decided that if we found any gold or diamonds they would not go to aid the German war effort. We would keep any findings for ourselves and if that was impossible then we would dispose of them. Otto was eleven years old and looked like six, while I was fourteen and looked like eleven - concentration camp conditions. Yet as far as I know on that occasion we represented the Ravensbruck Mens' Camp Resistance Movement. But how would we justify our employment? With our childish logic we felt that paper money could not be as valuable as gold and diamonds, and that was what we would hand to our captors. In



*Shoes taken from Holocaust victims,
Auschwitz-Birkenau*

doing this we were taking a calculated risk, for we knew that to be found with *Valuta*, as the Germans termed gold and jewelry, meant the gallows, with no mitigating circumstances.

We would sit there day in, day out, picking up a shoe, cutting open the instep and the heel, throwing it away, picking up the next shoe and so on. Anybody who has done mindless, repetitive work knows that one's thoughts can be far away and still the hands will continue with their appointed task. And so it happened one day that I saw something glistening among the scraps of leather in my apron. It was a gold 10-dollar piece that I had not even seen. With this find I started trembling uncontrollably, which luckily no one noticed. What also drew my attention was a piece of leather in my apron with the imprint of this coin on it. If one side of the coin had left an imprint, then there had to be another piece of similarly imprinted leather for the obverse side of the coin. If that was found then the game would be up. Feverishly I began to search through the leather in my apron and amongst the pieces recently discarded and was lucky enough to find the other imprint. I took my cobbler's knife and went to the toilet where I cut the imprinted leather pieces to bits and flushed them.

Coming out of the toilet, I found one of the Polish workers standing there waiting for me. "I know that you have found something," he said, "Give it to me!" I denied all knowledge and brushed past him. Later on I waited for an unguarded moment and, using the cobblers' tools, stitched the coin into the inner heel of my boot.

Some weeks went by. One day I was sitting next to Otto when I noticed that he had stopped working and was trembling. "Give!" I said, and surreptitiously he handed me a gold 5-ruble piece, which in due course was stitched into the heel of my other boot.

We made friends amongst the adults in the barrack, and would spend our evenings talking. One man was a German sailor whom I got to try and teach me navigation. Then there were two Norwegians, both captured for resistance activities. The one spoke halting English and we would converse. One had to be very careful with whom one spoke and what was said, for a misplaced word to an informer could land one in the hands of the Gestapo, but I grew to like and trust the Norwegians and would speak freely.

They had both come from a nearby camp called Sachsenhausen, where, they told me, people from Western countries were allowed to receive Red Cross parcels. In our hunger we would dwell on the contents of these parcels. Later on I would receive them myself and even after all these years I can

still lovingly enumerate most of what they contained.

Every day we would stand on *Appel*, and at the command: "*Achtung!*" we would come to attention and click our heels together. I have mentioned that boots were a luxury in that place and to prevent mine being stolen I would sleep with them under my pillow at night. One night I happened to look at the heels of my boots and saw the outline and imprint of two coins staring me in the face. This was the result of all my heel clicking. I then realized that I could not keep those coins any longer, for where was I to hide them?

I determined to speak to one of my Norwegian friends and find out whether he could exchange the coins for food. He was most reluctant and told me that there were certain unwritten rules for survival in concentration camps, one of which was not to touch *Valuta*. One would get camp fever, he explained, be sent to the *revier* and lie there in delirium. All one's secret fears would come to the fore, and the SS doctors, well acquainted with this phenomenon, would be there to listen. One's next public appearance would be on the gallows.

I told him that as a Jew I had nothing to lose, and was willing to take the risk. In due course and over a period of time, he managed to get me seven loaves of bread and a kilo of carrot jam for those two coins. Needless to say Otto and I shared everything that we had. In 2013 a numismatist estimated that those two coins would have been the equivalent of a little less than one Kruger rand. This means that at today's prices, we paid R12 000 for that fare.

On a few occasions we found paper money. These would be handed over to our German boss, who in turn handed them to the camp commander who would then come and thank us and reward us with several slices of rye bread smeared with lard. One slice we always kept for each of our Norwegians.

Our work at the cobbler's shop was not all bread and lard. It had a courtyard and there stood the block. This was a device one had to lie on when being flogged. One's feet would be locked into a box controlled by a lever and one's outstretched arms held down. The block had a downward slope towards the head, so that the buttocks were elevated. The flogging was carried out by the camp commandant alone or accompanied by one other person and they would use whips made of stitched leather about an inch (2.4cm) thick. When these showed signs of wear and tear they would be brought to us in the cobbler shop. I asked one of the men there to hit me just once with this thing and it was very painful.

Watching the flogging is one of my most terrible memories. A man would be brought in and held down on the block. His buttocks would be felt to see whether he had padded himself, and if so, his trousers and underwear removed, he would be beaten on his naked behind. I remember an occasion when the camp commandant and another man flogged a person, each one taking turns to strike a blow. Soon the victim began to writhe, then to scream horribly. Eventually in his agony he managed to pull one leg free from the box where it was supposed to remain locked in and he tried to kick his tormentors out of the way. This enraged them and they began to beat him as hard and fast as they could while all the time his terrible screaming rose to the heavens. Later, in Sachsenhausen, I saw a naked man with his one buttock looking like a dried raw piece of steak. There was no skin left and I was told that this was the result of repeated flogging.

Next to the cobbler shop was the *revier*. Occasionally I would cut myself and if the injury needed attention I would go to there. I once arrived in time to see a corpse being carried out in a sheet. I accompanied the body to see how it was disposed of and we walked to a small shed which, when opened, was found to contain a heap of corpses. Our corpse was heaved on top of the others, after which the jolly souls who had done the carrying picked me up by my arms and legs and made as if to throw me on top as well. Many of those corpses were leaking and I was not too impressed, but they were only pretending.

On Christmas 1944, we were all marched out of our barracks at night and made to

stand in the snow and sing carols to the camp commandant (Silent Night, Holy Night...). For this, we each received a dried-out piece of steak.

That winter they also held a delousing, but in contrast to the women's camp, we were not given fresh clothing to wear while ours were being processed. So all the Jewish boys were chased stark naked out into the snow to stand and shiver, much to the amusement of the onlookers. I got the boys to dance the Hora and to sing in an effort to be warm. That stopped the fun of course and after a while they let us back into the barrack.

By now the Russian front was approaching rapidly and the Germans were scraping the barrel for troops. Many of the older German Gypsies were battle-hardened soldiers, and one day they were told that as a special concession they would be taken out of the camp and allowed the honour of once again fighting for Fuhrer and Fatherland. There was one snag though; they were still not Aryans and could not expect to be let loose and pollute the German population with their genes. Therefore, before being released, they would each have to submit to a vasectomy.

The Gypsies were overjoyed at this, volunteered happily. I remember going to have a look at them as they lay unconscious on the floor at the *revier*. Only two of them escaped this fate. One was a subnormal boy who at the last moment went and hid himself; the second one who did not look like a Gypsy at all, being blond, said: "You killed most of my family in Auschwitz and now you want me to fight for you? Forget it!" He was the only one who showed any character out of the 300.

JEWISH AFFAIRS ROSH HASHANAH 2018 – SPECIAL FOCUS ON ISRAEL

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the birth of the State of Israel. To mark this milestone, the Rosh Hashanah 2018 issue of Jewish Affairs will largely be devoted to Israel themes, with particular reference to how closely the story of South African Jewry has been intertwined with that of the unfolding of the greater Zionist enterprise.

Jewish Affairs invites readers to contribute to what we hope will be one of the milestone issues of the journal, whether through submitting personal stories, photographs or original essays relating to modern-day Israel, its birth, subsequent development and contemporary challenges. This could include personal recollections of celebrating Israel's formal birth (and subsequent Yom Haatzmaut gatherings), involvement in the Zionist youth movements, fundraising, volunteering to serve in Israel during times of conflict or on kibbutzim, making aliyah and various other topics.

*All those interested in participating should write to the Editor
(david@sajbd.org/ Jewish Affairs, c/o SAJBD, PO Box 87557, Houghton, 2041).*

HOLOCAUST ART

*

Jeff Fine

In 2009 I was fortunate to attend a Holocaust studies for educators seminar at Yad Vashem. The highlight for me was a lecture on 'Art of the Holocaust' by Dr Rachel Perry - after this lecture I was sold. She explained how the art should be approached.

When discussing art relating to the Holocaust, it can be simplified into sections:

1. Artists who painted before the Holocaust and were murdered during the Holocaust.

Examples of these artists include:

A. Adolphe (Aizik) Feder

He was born in Odessa in the Ukraine in July 1886. He was arrested and sent to Drancy. He died in Auschwitz on 13 December 1943.



Figure 1 – 'Peace at last' (1927)
Pencil sketch, size 240 X 345 mm



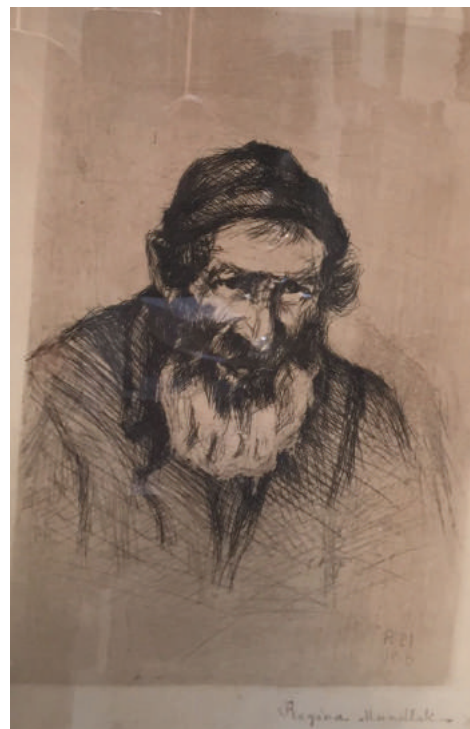
**Figure 2 – 'Les Bar Ques Sur Le Sable',
(Boats on the sand)**
Water colour, size 305 X 475 mm



Figure 3 – 'Lighthouse on Fire Island',
Water colour, size 305 X 475 mm

B. Regina Mandlak

She was born in Poland 1887. She was sent to the Warsaw Ghetto and died in Treblinka Death Camp in 1943.



**Figure 4 – Etching,
A Jewish Male figure (1906)**
*Signed RM 1906, in pencil,
size 340 X 240 mm*

C. K Klein

He was a Parisan martyr who was murdered by the Nazis.



Figure 5 – 'Tragic anticipation'
Size 210 X105 mm

This etching was reproduced in H Festers Yiddish book, The Martyred Jewish Artists of Paris.

2. Artists who painted during the Holocaust and survived.

A. Esther Lurie

She was born in Liepaja, Lithuania in 1913. She was interned in the Kovno Ghetto in 1941 and completed over 200 pen-and-ink sketches, most of which were destroyed. In 1944 she was deported to Nauen and Stutthoff concentration camps and was liberated by the Red Army in 1945. She emigrated, via Italy, to Israel.



Figure 6 – 'Demokratu Square'
Painted in 1956, a replica of her original which was destroyed.
Done in water colour pen and ink and signed in Hebrew.
Size: 150 X 240 mm

B. Adolf Adler (Ari) – "Ghetto Learning"

Born Rumania 1917. Died in Israel 1996. Send to Labour Camp in 1942 in the Ukraine. He escaped in 1944.

**C. Abraham Straski**

He was born in Poland in 1903 and survived the concentration camps of Europe. He passed away, in the USA, in 1987



Figure 8 – 'Rabbi carrying a Torah'
Oil on canvas
Size: 395 X 295 mm.

D. Stefan Schwartz

He was born 3 May 1927 in Budapest, Hungary. On the 15th May 1944, he was deported, together with 350 000 other Hungarians, by cattle car, to Auschwitz, where he became number 37797.



Figure 9 – 'Dispersion'
Size: 690 X 495 mm
Painted in a medium known as dispersion.
This painting was reproduced in the book written by Fritz Billeter titled Stefan Schwartz, Zurich.



Figure 10 – ‘Fur Fbr’
*A set of seven digital collages of female figures with rubbings of sign boards.
 Set marked as number 9/10.*

E. Timor Weiss, later known as Weisz

He was born in Czechoslovakia and survived the Holocaust and settled in Johannesburg with his mother, Reska Weiss who wrote (‘Journey Through Hell’), and his brother, Dr Gabriel Weiss (‘And So He Survived’).



Figure 11 – Here Oberst -
*‘The bloody merciless killer of Jews’ who
 had a glass eye’
 Painting on silk, ‘Aleph’ could be
 his first painting.
 Size: 190 X 150 mm*

3. Artists born of parents who survived the Shoah

A. Cornelia Kaufmann

She was born in Thalwil in 1959 and in 1982 moved to Zurich to study.



Figure 12 – ‘The Ice Queen’, 1989
*A naked child, broken down at the base
 of a statue, to melt the marble coldness of
 the monument through its embrace.
 Oil on canvas.
 Size: 445 X 310 mm. Signed Ck89.*

RAFFLE IN AID OF AN SOS FOR THE AGED CALL CENTRE AND TO RAISE FUNDS FOR SOSA (formerly Shiur-on-Sally's Alley)

About SOS for the Aged NPC (SOSA):

Since our humble beginnings in 2012, SOSA has grown to reach some 1000 senior citizens living in retirement homes or private dwellings across Gauteng, many with no family in town to assist.

Our projects and services include:

Connecting our young learners and community with our precious senior citizens through our unique personalised friendship gifts projects.
See www.SOSA.joburg ...

This call centre is expected to be a first for Gauteng, and to help:

- Increase the number of daily check-in calls, to our at risk senior citizens living alone

- Improve response times after call for help activation of the TeleCare™ service, currently used by many senior citizens in our community and more.

R' Shaun Wingrin, Director of SOSA.

1ST PRIZE: A return airline ticket to Israel

Sponsor: Harvey World Travel Birnam

2ND PRIZE: 1/2 oz Kruger Rand

3RD PRIZE: Wireless Speaker System

Sponsor: Bose of Rosebank

4TH PRIZE: Linen

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new POETRY

BONNY BROOK

In cold weather
Summer or winter
Day or night
A residence of delight
Layout, stylistic music,
Short strolls to the beach
Memories, reveries,
Dimmed lights

Once again hearing
Those intermittent calls
The dash and splash
Of the sea and its squalls

At night a surfer
Lazes on a soft bed
Large cushions outspread
Whistling winds outside
Knock at wooden windows
Subliminal sounds
Elemental and profound
"I've returned, I've returned"

Whistling winds outside
Knock at wooden windows
Subliminal sounds
Elemental and profound
"I've returned, I've returned
So many years I've longed to be here"
He mumbles
"Tomorrow I'll meet my buddies once more"

A salty taste on his lips
Dozing he whispers
"So many years before
At last I am here!
I'm tidal once more."

Ben Krengel

LIKE CHINESE WOMEN

Like Chinese women
binding their daughters feet,
my Mother bound our lives
with Sabbath candles
and braided bread.
Always
weaving the candle flame
through her hair
as she prayed,
and always
her eyes binding
our hearts
with ancient fears.

Bernard Levinson

POETRY

I pondered and wondered
Where the difference lay
Between poetry and prose
Between these words and those

I questioned and listened; contemplated and read
And finally wide-awake but still dreaming in bed
The answer appeared
Aligned in my head
...

Poetry is the fusion of
Word art and word music
It is mind images encapsulated
In charismatic cadence
It is word magic

Poetry portrays the sensitivity
Embedded in the psyche
It intensifies insight and imagination
Experience and emotion
Into exquisite, consummate expression

Poetry is the mortal sound of the soul

Charlotte Cohen

‘RIPPLES IN THE FABRIC OF SPACETIME’

Musings on the collision of two Neutron Stars as reported in Business Day on 17 October 2017

As I shuddered at the thought of our country's crime
And viewed with distaste my suburbs grime
And smelled with aversion pollution's slime
My stress slowly eased as I recalled this rhyme
"Ripples in the fabric of spacetime"

Ripples in the fabric of spacetime, they say,
Are caused by gravitational waves far away
That followed an explosion of cataclysmic force.
One thirty million light years away was its source.
What all that means, really does not concern me.
It's the music of the words that makes me see

Regions beyond the Sun's heat and rays
Going even further beyond our atmosphere's haze.
And racing away from Earth's 24 hour days
Lies a universe with billions of stars all ablaze.
Destruction, creation two sides to one face
Many stars explode, new planeted ones, fill their place

I turn now to a dreadful new thought
One more worrying, one much more fraught.
Mother Earth is awash with vindictive hate
With war, murder, butchery in too many a State.
We read of violent massacres and suicide bombs
Terror attacks, assassinations and state-inspired pogroms.

These malevolently, carelessly and willfully wipe out
Thousands of ordinary folk that are going about
Innocent duties that make up their daily grind.
Our societies are bedeviled by those of evil mind

Violence seems to rule our modern age.
Are we now at the horrifying stage
When Earth, daughter of the Universe, like chastising mothers
Proclaim to sinners but alas, also to all others

"I need you and you need me.
We coexist and are partners in the miracle of life.
Man is no match for the unimaginable power
That creates, resides in and controls the Universe.
So if you want violence, let me show you violence,
Like the violence of colliding neutron stars.
Call it climate change, call it global warming,
Here is yet another deadly warning."

" I HAVE ALREADY SENT YOU AND WILL CONTINUE TO SEND YOU HURRICANES
OF INORDINATE STRENGTH; MIGHTY WINDS THAT TOPPLE TREES AND POWER
LINES; RAINFALL THAT FLOODS THE LAND; FIRES THAT BURN THE FORESTS,
HOMES AND TOWNS; DEVASTATION TO OUTDO ALL YOUR PUNY ACTS.
HEREAFTER THESE WILL BE THE EARTH'S NEW FACTS"

"But if you cease to violently hate one another
And instead let me be your loving mother
If you stop your virulent shedding of blood
That leaves countless lying dead in the mud
If you don't yell at a beggar to get out of the way
But instead give him food to live another day.
If you put love and respect in its place
Then I will save the human race."

Honey Gluckman

A STAR OF DAVID FELL FROM HEAVEN Ilan Ramon, 1954-2003

"Over there,
in that arched blue, on the edge of the air,
I once lived. My window was fragile.
Maybe what remained of me
were little gliders..."

- Dan Pagis: *Footprints*

this lance of fire
this blowtorch of plasma
these crematoria hands of mach 19
tore one wing off an angel:

- we fell off Jacob's ladder.

so:
this diary,
this cloth Star of David:
orphaned.

tell Dan Pagis it's all in our
Draft Agreement
on the Rescue of Astronauts
& the Return of Astronauts:

(Dear Colonel,
we regret
that your 17-day visa for heaven
has expired.)

"As to the yellow star: immediately
it will be torn from your chest
and will emigrate
to the sky."

As to the blue star: immediately
it will be torn from your chest
and will repatriate you
to the earth.

tumbling,
we fluttered sixty kms down
we stumbled
onto the earth
next to Palestine.

Keith Gottschalk
Hebrew translation by Devis Iosifzon

מגן-דוד נפל מן השמים

אילן רמון 1954 – 2003

חבר: קית' גוטשלק

תרגם לעברית: דוויס יוסיפזון

"הנה שם,

בפחל הקמור ההוא, על שפת האויר,
תייתי פעם. שביר היה חלוני.

אולי שרדו ממני

רק דאונים קטנים..."

- דן פגיס: עקבות¹

חנית אש זו

מבער זה של פלסמה²

ידי משרפה אלו של מאך 19

תלשו אחת מכנפיו של מלאך:

- נפול נפלנו מסלם יעקב.

וכן:

יומן זה,

מגן-דוד זה העשוי בד

התייתמו.

אמרו לך פגיס שהכל קים

בטיוטת הסכם לשלומים³

לחלוץ אסטרונאוטים

ולהחזיר אסטרונאוטים:

(אלוהי-משנה נכבד,

לצערנו

האשרה שלך לשהיה בת-17 ימים בשמים

פג תקפה.)

"נאשר לפוכב הצהב: מיד

יתלש מעל החזה

ויהגר

לשמים."

אשר לפוכב הפחול: מיד

יתלש מעל החזה

ויהגר אותך בחזרה

לכדור הארץ.

מסתחררים,

רפרפנו מטה ששים קילומטרים

מעדנו

על פני האדמה

על יד פלסטין.⁴

¹ פגיס, דן, כל השירים: "אבא" [פרקי פרוזה] / דן פגיס, הקיבוץ המאוחד, ירושלים, 1991, ע' 141-146
² מושג מתחום הפיזיקה: כאשר אוויר מגיע לחום של אלפי מעלות המולקולות שבו מתפרקות והופכות לאטומים. השימוש באלמנטים מעולם המדע הוא מאפיין המופיע באחדים משיריו של דן פגיס
³ פגיס, דן, כל השירים: "אבא" [פרקי פרוזה] / דן פגיס, הקיבוץ המאוחד, ירושלים, 1991, ע' 140
⁴ עיירה בשם פלסטין (Palestine) הנמצאת במזרח מדינת טקסס (Texas) שבארצות הברית שבקרבתה נמצאו השרידים המוזכרים בשיר

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yours a happy and
peaceful Passover.
Chag Sameach.

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