

# S.A. SIG

Jewish Genealogy - South African Special Interest Group  
Vol 2 Issue 4 September/October 2001

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The calendar highlight for me was the 21st International Conference on Jewish Genealogy held in London in July. As co-chairman with R. George Anticoni I can say that the outstanding success of the conference was a result of very hard work over many months by a very willing team of volunteers. I was pleased to have Colin Plen, Chairman of the Johannesburg Jewish Genealogy Society, as one of the most willing volunteers during the conference

The South African input both from speakers and in various SIGs was significant. Mendel Kaplan gave a most interesting and moving talk on 'The Soul of a Shtetl- from Rietevie via Parow to Ra'anana'. Roy Ogus (Palo Alto) and I ran a well attended workshop on SA Research and genealogy. This generated a number of new members for the SIG. Prof Cecil Helman (ex Cape Town) gave a cultural Anthropologist's view of Jewish Genealogy. This was followed by Prof. Adam Kuper (anthropologist ex-Johannesburg) on Kinship and Cousin Marriages amongst the Rothschild family.

Beverly Olsberg gave a very entertaining and useful talk on how to organize a Family Reunion. Her Sossen family had a reunion with around 130 people on the banks of

the Limpopo near the Victoria Falls (probably the first and last one ever to be held there!). Prof Lewis Wolpert gave a provocative, entertaining and enlightening summing up of the whole day mini-symposium on Genetics and Genealogy. Another all day symposium was headed by Prof. Aubrey Newman and several papers dealt with the Jews Temporary Shelter and other aspects relating to SA migration. Jill Geber and Hazel Dakers participated in the British Library symposium, and Hazel also spoke on her fascinating Norden and Norton family ancestors. Rose Lerer Cohen (Parow) gave a detailed analysis of The Third Reich Railroad System and its place in genealogy.

Arlene Beare organized, with assistance from Constance Whippman, The Latvian SIG, and in fact the whole series of talks around Latvia. Arlene's contribution to the programme committee was outstanding and we were very grateful for her successful efforts in soliciting major sponsorship.

The most exciting result of this conference was that Mendel Kaplan was very impressed with the range and scope of what is happening in genealogy and the contribution being made to further Jewish culture and continuity. He called me two weeks ago with what he termed 'a crazy idea'. From my perspective I did not think it was too crazy. The 'unterster shure' is that he has decided to set up a Jewish Genealogical and Migration Research Centre at the University of Cape Town. He has already met the Vice-Chancellor and the Head of Humanities and has their approval and that of the board of the Kaplan Centre. He has raised substantial outside sponsorship to fund this. This Centre will be under the Direction of Professor Milton Shain, currently Head of Jewish Studies. The prime focus will be on researching the estimated 14,000 Jewish families that came mainly from Lithuania and Latvia, their origins, where they went to in SA and where subsequent generations have migrated to. The inter-relationships between families will be studied. This will be at graduate level with interdisciplinary and distance learning modules. In addition a genealogical research facility aimed at the general public will be set up probably at the South African Jewish Museum. I am honoured to be involved at the initiation of this project and to serve on the Board of management.

I believe that this will probably be the first academic department dealing with the specific focus of Jewish Genealogy anywhere in the world. I would welcome input of all types from the SA SIG Members and in particular about under-researched areas or other new sources of SA Jewish genealogical information that members know of.

Shana Tova to all.  
Saul Issroff

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## EDITORIAL

Now that we are over the "teething problems" and "ups and downs", knowing that all beginnings are difficult, I am very happy to be sending you our Rosh Hashanah edition of the South African Special Interest Group's Newsletter.

We have a varied magazine of interesting topics. Australia has been very active in this issue and I am pleased to have received 2 letters from members in Perth and Melbourne, as well as Bubble's Segal's interesting report on her life in the Australian Outback. Haim Pogrund's reminiscences will probably bring many a smile, mingled perhaps with a few tears, in his "Days of Awe" article of his youth in Cape Town.

Without saying too much about the contents of this issue, I leave the rest to your reading pleasure. I must ask the forgiveness of our contributors and readers for some modest editing in the interests of space, continuity and standardised spelling.

Please keep in touch with us remembering that many South African communities no longer have a Jewish population, and for those of you who have information of these communities, we would appreciate your sharing this with us. Perhaps you have interesting "tidbits" about family traditions that you would like to share, or perhaps a special recipe that was passed down from generation to generation, which was used over Shabbat or the Holydays.

I look forward to hearing from you and for those of you who do not have e-mail and wish to contribute to our Newsletter, please write to me at 19/17 Schwartz Street, Ra-anana, Israel. (e-mail: [tuis@zahav.net.il](mailto:tuis@zahav.net.il)).

Opinions expressed in articles are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the S.A. S.I.G., its officers or editor.

Just a reminder that membership fees of \$20. for the year July 2001 to June 2002 are now due.

Cheques for renewal or new membership can be mailed to Mike Getz at S.A.SIG, 5450 Whitley Park Terrace #901, Bethesda MD 20814. Cheques from outside the US must be drawn on a US bank. Enquiries about membership can be addressed to Mike at [mgetz@erols.com](mailto:mgetz@erols.com) or Beryl Baleson [tuis@zahav.net.il](mailto:tuis@zahav.net.il)

I wish you all a SHANA TOVA.  
Beryl Baleson.

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## CLEARINGHOUSE OF SA-SIG INFORMATION.

Appeal from Roy Ogus, Palo Alto, California, U.S.A.

We all know that many of us researching our family histories in Southern Africa possess various documents, information and other artifacts relating to our own research that may be useful to others who are also researching their family connections in this area. It was agreed at the meeting of the Southern Africa SIG (SA-SIG) at the 2000 International Jewish Genealogy Symposium in Salt Lake City, that it would be useful to create a Clearinghouse of this information and provide this resource to the SA-SIG research community. The Clearinghouse would contain references to the various items with enough information to allow researchers to determine whether the actual item may be of interest to them. The Clearinghouse would also provide contact information (e.g. an e-mail or other address) to the person who owns the particular item of interest.

I am now planning to create this Clearinghouse of information, which, when completed, would be accessible on the Web pages of the S.A.-SIG on JewishGen. Note that the clearinghouse is initially planned to contain only the REFERENCES to the various artifacts of interest, and not embody the actual information from the references themselves. It is hoped in the future that some consolidation of this information may be possible in an on-line database, but the latter project is out of the scope of the present clearinghouse activity.

I am soliciting your help to make this clearinghouse as comprehensive and complete as possible. I would appreciate your sending me information about any items that you possess which you think could be of possible interest to other researchers. Examples of such items are books, documents, articles, photographs, passenger lists, city directory information, etc.

Again, I'm not asking that you send me copies of these actual items, but rather I would like just a short description of the artifact that you own. I will compile and organize these descriptions and make this information available via the SA-SIG web page.

For each item, please provide as much of the following information as you can:

- Type of artifact, such as book, document, article, photograph, passenger list, city directory information, etc.
- A short description of the item.
- Places mentioned or referred to in the artifact (towns, etc).
- The approximate time period that the item covers.
- Any surnames mentioned in the item.
- Anything else about the item that you think would be interesting to your fellow researchers.

- The method by which you would prefer to be contacted, if others were interested in learning more about your item (i.e. e-mail address, regular mail address, etc.)

Some examples of submissions are as follows:

1. Article on the Jewish Community of King Williamstown, Cape Province, dated 1984.
2. Photograph of the residents of the Cape Town Jewish Orphanage, 1920's or 1930's.
3. Passenger list which documents the names of people sailing on the ship "Usaramo" from Hamburg to South West Africa and South Africa in October 1931.
4. Article on the history of the "Silver Aerated Water Factory", a soft-drink factory that was established in Stellenbosch, Cape Province in 1902.
5. Article from the S.A. Jewish Times (dated 1948) on the "Story of South African Jewry".
6. Partial extracts from Middledrift and King Williams Town (Cape Province) Residents Directories during the period 1922-1930.

Thanks for your help. I look forward to your inputs. I hope that this compilation of information will be useful to all of us in our research.

Roy Ogus  
Palo Alto, California, U.S.A.  
e-mail: ogus@compact.xerox.com

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## **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:**

Hello Beryl,

About 35,000 ex South African Jews now live in Aussie.  
There are quite a few snippets of SA news I can give you, relating to the South African Melbourne Jewish community

In Melbourne, the S.A. "Yids" have started their own Shul called Central Chabad. They bought the entire contents of the old Schoonder Street Shul in the Gardens, Cape Town (this Shul closed earlier this year), including the seating, Bimah, Aron Kodesh. These have been containerised into six 40' containers, and are on the way to Melbourne.

Interestingly, the Aron Kodosh was donated by Litvak migrants to Cape Town to the Schoonder Street Shul. Their grandchildren now live here, and have "redonated" the Aron Kodosh to the South African Melbourne Shul, Central Chabad.

One event is a MAJOR shift of residence [over the past 6 years] from the Doncaster / Templestowe area [a suburb very similar to Saxonwold JHB - which in local Australian folklore is {WAS} known as "little Africa, or Templestowe-by-the veldt" to the Jewish area of Melbourne called CAULFIELD [or the "kosher belt"]].

We have lost 600 Jewish families to Caulfield, 85% of them South African.

So much so, that the Doncaster shul which had an overflow to their High Holiday parallel service, with tens of people trying to get in, now struggles to make a daily minyan.

By contrast, the "Caulfield South Africans", have just bought the Caulfield public library building for \$1.6 million [A\$], and will convert it into a new shul - but already its totally oversubscribed, and their membership list is CLOSED.

Perth's Jewish community (I will guess at 9000) is 60% South African.

Same goes for Auckland NEW ZEALAND - Jewish community there is 62% ex South African.

Ex-South Africans have a VERY high JEWISH public life profile, and in some areas dominate ! eg: The previous Australian Maccabi team [from the bridge disaster] comprised nearly 40% ex South African persons.

CHEERS

Herbert Epstein

Melbourne, Australia.

Dear Beryl

re: The Vredehoek Shul

My family were members on my mother's side (Teper). Although my parents were members of the Schoonder St shul from the early 50's to the 70's, I had my barmitzvah (April 1963) in the Vredehoek Shul as Cantor Kousevitsky was away on holiday. It was probably for the better as Cantor Lichterman taught me my portion. At the time, I was also best friends with his son, Joel, who now lives in the USA. Rabbi Marcus was then the Rabbi. In 1965, I joined the Schoonder St shul choir, as baritone, and sang there till I left SA in 1975.

We now live in one of the fastest growing Jewish communities in the world, in Perth. Today, Australia is no. 1 destination for South Africans (if they can get in). However, I always remember my youth in Cape Town and reckon that we lived through a golden era of SA Jewry.

Here in Perth, our kids (twin boys of 13 and girl of 10) have a very similar Jewish life (without the Bobbas and Zeidas). They attend Carmel School which is more "frum" than Herzlia but also the top school in Western Australia. There are about 7,000 Jews here now, half from SA.

Another familiar name, now in Perth, is Julian Todres from Highlands. You also may remember Leslie Pinn and Hilary Kawolsky (nee Hershler). The Grunewald family have been in Sydney for about 20 years. Last year I organised a 60th Anniversary for Herzlia. See the old boys web site.

One of my sons and I now sing in the Northern Hebrew Cong. Shul in Perth, Western Australia. Anthony Gordon also from Cape Town is choir master. Leslie Pinn also sings with us. He sang in the Garden Shul choir for many years.

Regards  
Ivor Kosowitz  
Perth, Australia

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## **ZIMBABWE'S DWINDLING JEWISH COMMUNITY**

Published in the Zimbabwe Standard - by Julie Goodman October 2000.

Ray Hasson slid into her seat at the Sephardi Hebrew congregation of Zimbabwe and poised herself to observe the evening's service as she has done every Friday night for the last 43 years. But as she peered out over the Synagogue's modest beauty - the stretch of ruby carpeting, the rekindled eternal light, and the Ark facing North toward Jerusalem - her eyes settled on something a little disquieting. She was surrounded by rows and rows of unfilled pews. The synagogue was virtually empty. The gathering, which amounted to no more than 25 Jews, was a stark contrast to several decades ago when the congregation was a thriving Centre of Jewish heritage.

Ray gestured to the upper balcony which, now completely empty, used to hold the overflow of thousands of members who packed into the room. "It's gone, it's finished", she said. It's not possible to carry on at the figures we are today.

Ray Hasson, 63, is now one of only 173 Jews who belong to congregation, down from the several thousand it had in the 1950's. She is part of a slowly dying tradition in Harare, one of the areas in the world which can boast of having active congregations of both Sephardic Jews, descendants of Spain and Portugal, and Ashkenazi Jews, descendants of Eastern Europe.

The change saddens this community, which recalls a time when High Festival services, weddings and engagements were occasions to draw residents out in droves.

"If you didn't come early, you had standing room in the back", said Rev. Leon Mayo, 76, who leads services at the congregation. "And all the ladies' seats were taken. It was full, it was a pleasure to do a service in front of so many people.

Slowly, slowly they all vanished all over the place", he said. "Over the years, they all went to America, to Canada, to Australia, to Europe, to Italy, to all over".

They began as a community of doctors, lawyers, accountants and business owners who immigrated here mostly from the Greek island of Rhodes, and some from Egypt, parting with family members who ultimately died in concentration camps.

They established careers here and watched their children give birth to children. But when the government changed hands in 1980, the younger generations began to flee, seeking higher education abroad. Now, with the economy in shambles, they continue to go "on horseback", Rev. Mayo said, leaving an aging community to assemble in their wake. Those left remain an intensely close group who look after one another, acutely aware of when someone's spouse has fallen ill or when someone's son is preparing for a Barmitzvah.

With a familiarity borne of decades of friendship, Friday evening brings them together in faithful worship, an event ushered in with soft kisses and greets of "Shabbat Shalom". The group is so small though, that Rev. Mayo has to sometimes plead with members to form a Minyan, to be present to remove the Torah from its Ark. Their pain is compounded by the slow loss of the country's handful of Holocaust survivors. "We're dying, we're just dying", said Cyril Gordon, 74, a member of the Ashkenazi Synagogue, the Harare Hebrew Congregation, the other of the city's two Synagogues. "We haven't laid down and died yet, but eventually..."

Harold Abrahamson, 74 the spiritual leader of the Ashkenazi synagogue said he has about 300 congregants now, compared to 7,000 - 8,000 several decades ago. The congregation's Sharon School, once full with Jewish students, now has only 40 of 200 Jews. The synagogue's library, a collection of outdated books, is no longer used. "There's the aim here of trying to keep the community alive," Abrahamson said. A touchy subject, but one thing Jews in Harare must realise is that they must face the fact of the merging of the two synagogues. It is an ideal but impractical solution for the two communities who share a common faith but have different traditions and backgrounds and acknowledge a mutual tension that would make the compromise difficult.

Like others, Rev. Mayo, is skeptical about what can be done to reverse the trend. He just continues to lead services, watching the lives of his congregants carry on. He spoke of a Holocaust survivor who had become seriously ill. Her teary-eyed husband had recently told the reverend he feared his wife had only a few hours to live. Rev. Mayo recalled the man's wife, once a beautiful young woman who returned from Auschwitz like a "broken doll". He said a prayer for her at the evening's service. She died the next day.

Sitting in the synagogue just after the morning service, Rev. Mayo watched the spread of kosher food being cleared from the table as the sun streaked through a golden stained glass Star of David looming over the pews. His gray-blue eyes clouded up and he choked on his words. "We know that we have a memory that will never materialise again as it was", he said. "It will never be. Never be."

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## **THE COPPERBELT COUPLE**

Jerusalem Post, May 2001.

Article written by Matthew Gutman/JTA

Dragging himself into the H. Figov Store on two sticks that serve as crutches, Muli Mulenga, wearing a threadbare Mickey Mouse T-shirt and torn pants, desperately hopes for a pair of metal crutches.

Owner Dennis Figov, dressed in his trademark safari suit, ducks into his storeroom and emerges seconds later with two used sturdy crutches, which he gives to the paraplegic for free. Incidents like this have helped make the Figovs legendary in Luanshya, one of the most depressed mining towns in Zambia, located some 32 kilometers from the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly known as Zaire.

However, the Figov's prominence in Luanshya - a place that time and modern technology seem to have forgotten - is cemented by another fact of paramount importance to Zambia's devout Christians: Maureen and Denis Figov are the last Jews left in Zambia's Copperbelt, a region that in the 1960s boasted some 300 Jewish families.

The predominately Christian community is peculiarly attached to Luanshya's two Jews, whom they consider "blessed people", both because they are pillars of the community and for their "biblical background". The Rev. Moses Tembo, who led the drive to name the town's central avenue after Figov, calls the Jews "the promised people". "You see", Tembo says, "Jewish skin is not white; it is an exception." This belief is ingrained in the minds of many Zambians. Tembo recalls the day that a friend visiting from the nearby city of Ndola drove into Luanshya just to shake Figov's hand and bless him - "because the Bible says, "If you bless a Jew, you will also be blessed" Tembo says.

Figov's home and his consignment store, off Denis Figov Avenue, are repositories of the region's history.

In operation continuously since Figov's father opened for business in 1936, the store contains beautifully maintained Singer sewing machines, ancient watches, and new and old furniture.

In Figov's home, old photographs of his pioneering family, his badge from his stint as Luanshya mayor, community service awards from former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda - and even roadside mileage markers - reflect the past 80 years of the region's history.

A sprightly and energetic 68, Figov is one of the oldest people in Luanshya - many Zambians do not live past 40 because of disease - and the younger generation respects him as an elder. Even his fellow board members on the Ndola Chamber of Commerce executive committee seek his advice on matters of historical precedence.

Men, women and children, crippled by various tropical diseases that flourish in the region's humidity, crawl into Figov's store, asking for crutches, financial advice and food. Figov rarely sends them away empty-handed. Countless non-governmental organizations operate in the Copperbelt, but the Figovs still dole out crutches, wheelchairs and food for free.

Heavy rains and a lack of maintenance have destroyed Luanshya's roads. Thieves often steal the telephone wires, melting them down for copper, and there are constant blackouts. Beggars line city streets and small-time entrepreneurs hawk cheap wares to passersby. The dire poverty drives rampant crime.

Still, the crime is rarely vicious, according to the Figovs, who, like most Luanshya residents with any money, have been robbed. Two years ago, burglars broke into the Figovs' house and demanded dollars, shattering Figov's ribs and wrist with a crowbar. "In South Africa", Figov says nonchalantly, "they would have killed me. Here, luckily, due to the deep Christian influence, the mentality is largely different. They steal, but don't kill."

The face of Luanshya has changed drastically since the 1960s, when Figov served four years as mayor and the city was orderly bustling. The copper mine, the town's principal employer, boasted one of the best hospitals in Africa. Now the hospital stocks less than 5 percent of the medicines it needs, and is staffed only by nurses. The mine also kept countless merchants and traders in business. Today, the vast majority of these businesses are crumbling skeletons of buildings, whose owners have long since emigrated.

The Jews' history in the Copperbelt is a story of slow and steady rise, then a quick decline. Jews who had emigrated from Latvia to Cape Town and became incorporated into the British Empire, first began moving into the Copperbelt in the 1920s.

Some were pioneers who left South Africa to chase adventure and riches on the frontier, while others simply followed the northward expansion of British influence, earning their living as butchers, merchants or sellers of packaged goods. At its height, the community supported a synagogue, whose prosperity was directly linked to the mine's.

Problems for the community began after Zambia, formerly known as Northern Rhodesia, became independent from Britain in 1964. Kaunda, Zambia's new, Marxist-leaning leader, declared that only native Zambians could acquire work permits, forbidding foreigners to work in positions that Zambians could fill.

With memories of the Holocaust fresh in their minds, many Jews feared to exchange the protection of their British passports for Zambian ones. "Others who were immigrants from apartheid South Africa, could simply not tolerate living under and paying taxes to a black-dominated government," Figov says.

Most industries were nationalized in the 1960s and the few Jews who had stayed were soon driven out by nepotism, corruption and plummeting copper prices. As the economy declined, Zambians who could not afford to flee or bribe officials suffered through food shortages and starvation.

Figov's wife, Maureen recalls lining up at 2.a.m. to purchase necessities such as soap, toilet paper, bread, butter and sugar. Another peril came from the northeast as unpaid Zairean soldiers crossed into Zambia, hijacking cars, robbing stores and pillaging towns.

Crime, poverty and hardship continue to take a toll. Nevertheless, each day Maureen Figov takes her car and braves the spine-cracking potholes to the Da Gama School for the Crippled and the Rotary Internations School for Disadvantaged, which she and Dennis support with funds, food and school materials.

Nevertheless, the most difficult part of living in Luanshya is the boredom and isolation, the Figovs say. The international community of engineers, doctors and professionals has moved away, leaving mainly poor farmers. Even the Figovs' two sons, who went to England to attend University, married British women and never returned.

To shop for food, the Figovs make the arduous journey an hour each way to the slightly less-depressed town of Ndola, rarely finding all the basic products they want. "Peas, I just want a packet of peas," a frustrated Maureen Figov says.

Other than weekend liquidation sales for the auction house, business is slow. The Figovs' 15 employees, some of whom have been with the business for 53 years, mill around aimlessly but Dennis hasn't the heart to discharge them.

He says he and his wife would move to their apartment in Cape Town, if he could find a buyer for his store. Yet, he says, "Zambia is my home. I have been here since I was two weeks old, and I love it here".

## MAHAL

### ("Mitnadvei Hutz Le-Aretz") - Volunteers from Abroad.

An extract from "Seventy Years of South African Aliyah".

There is no doubt that the Mahal, Volunteers from Abroad was the most dramatic South African contribution to Israel during its War of Independence in 1948. South Africans also played a great part in building up and operating the Israel Air Force. This role included providing planes, manpower and expertise.

When World War II broke out almost simultaneously with the issue by the British Government of the Passfield White paper limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine and Jewish land acquisition there, David Ben-Gurion, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency, announced that the "Yishuv" (i.e. the Settlement) would fight the War as if there was no White Paper, and would fight the White Paper as if there was no War.

This policy resulted, on the one hand, in many Jews in Palestine enlisting in the British forces and on the other hand, in the strengthening of the "Haganah"; "Palmach"; "Irgun Zvai Leumi" (IZL) and "Lochamei Herut Yisrael" (Lechi). Many Southern Africans who had settled in Israel in the 1930's and 1940's enlisted in the British Army.

Abraham Katz was killed in the defence of Hanita, the famous kibbutz established overnight in 1938 on the Lebanese border. Herzl Genussow, who enlisted in "The Green Howards", was killed in an accident while on manoeuvres in Madagascar. Major Harry Joffe was on an Allied troopship that sank in the Mediterranean, and he helped to save the lives of many of the men afloat in the water. Later, in the War of Independence, he was severely wounded when leading a convoy of trucks up to Jerusalem in an attempt to relieve the siege.

Max Schumacher, Louis Shapiro, Max Kahn (who became a senior officer after the War in the Haifa police, in which Shapiro also served), Colin Gluckmann (later appointed State Attorney, when, at Ben-Gurion's insistence, he changed his name to Gillon), was mentioned in despatches, Kalman Keet, Archie Dorfan, Eli Kirschner, Harry Schumacher, Hugo Alperstein and Bernie Slome all served in the British forces with distinction.

Billy Falk drove a bus transporting "Haganah" personnel. Harry Salber, a founder of Kibbutz Ma'ayan Baruch, played an important role in the defence of the Galilee. Nora Miller, one of the first South African English teachers, served in Cairo as an officer in the Royal Air Force.

Southern African graduates of the Bnei Akiva movement were founders of Kfar Etzion in the Gush Etzion area, near Hebron. Arab forces overran the kibbutz in May, 1948, massacred many of the inhabitants and took the rest into captivity. After their release, some of the survivors including surviving widows, founded Moshav Massuot Yitzhak near Ashkelon. Several went back, after 1967, to re-create Gush Etzion (The Etzion Bloc).

Nava Nurock (now Lapidot) was serving as a nurse in the Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus in April 1948, when a convoy of doctors, nurses and other personnel, on the way up to the hospital through Sheikh Jarragh, was ambushed and set on fire by Arab terrorists. Seventy-seven people were massacred.

Shmuel Katz and his wife Doris were both active in the IZL, Shmuel being a member of the High Command. All these activities by former South Africans, of course, did not take place in any South African framework: those concerned functioned as Palestinian Jews. An organised framework for Southern Africans to contribute military service to the "Yishuv" and Israel, only came into being when "Mahal" was created early in 1948..

The Jewish Agency set out to supplement the potential Israeli army founded by "Haganah" and "Palmach", by calling on Jewish World War II veterans to volunteer for the Jewish forces in Palestine. These volunteers were called "Mahal" - and they became a sort of Israeli Foreign Legion. A similar call for volunteers was made by IZL, which was also successful. Altogether 3,000 Southern Africans answered the call of the "Mahal" and of them, 800 were accepted. Some were retrained in South Africa. Two training centers were established, one at Bacher's farm near Johannesburg and the other at Witbank.

The enlistment, training and despatch of the volunteers to Israel was organised by well-known South African Jewish soldiers, including former air ace, Colonel Cecil Margo and Major Leo Kowarsky. Colonel Lionel Meltzer put together a large medical contingent including many carefully selected specialists, namely Dr. Jack Wilton; Dr. Louis Miller; Dr. Gershon Gitlin; Dr. Victor Resnekov; Dr. Arthur Helfet; Dr. Cyril Kaplan; Dr. Israel Schweppe; Dr. Harry Bank; Dr. George Mundell; Dr. Isaac Kaplan; Dr. Bernie Hirschowitz; Dr. Mendel Klaff and Dr. Mary Gordon. This medical contingent were joined by South Africans already living in Palestine namely Dr. Abe Hurwitz; Dr. Ron Sobel (Shouval) and Dr. Miriam Gitlin. Dr. Alan Price was a member of a group of Mahal volunteers who got to Rome in July 1948, and came with survivors of the Holocaust on a Greek ship to Haifa.

Covering as they did, a wide range of specialisation, the Southern African Mahal medical personnel played major roles in the Israel Medical Corps. Many of the doctors who came to Israel in the "Mahal", stayed on as permanent settlers.

Getting to Israel and into the Israel Defence Forces was not entirely straightforward. David Teperson and eight other Southern Africans left South Africa on April 5, 1948, and were arrested in Cairo. Teperson and Harold Evion explained they were Dutch Reform Church ministers, and were allowed to go on to Paris. The others were released after a couple of days and also went on to France.

In France the volunteers spent five weeks in a Displaced Persons camp in Marseilles and were trained by "Palmach" in the surrounding hills. At the beginning of May, they left Marseilles on one of the "little ships" of Aliya Bet, the "S.S. Tetti". They landed in Tel Aviv on a most auspicious date, May 15, 1948, the day of the Declaration of the State of Israel.

David Teperson and Harold Evion joined the Haganah on the day they landed in Tel Aviv, and were sent to the Alexandroni Brigade on the following day. Teperson participated in all the battles on the central front until the first cease-fire on June 11, 1948. Later he served in the Jeep Company of the Palmach Negev brigade. Joseph Shlain, another artilleryman, was placed in a unit armed with anti-aircraft guns - the first such seen in Israel.

Several others with experience in the artillery - Honie (Yochanan) Rosenberg, Freddy Salant, Dave Schmidt and Eli Robin arrived in June. They went to Tel Aviv in search of a unit to join, but could not find one: the newly established Israel Defence Forces were still rapidly improvising units as best they could. They were sitting forlornly on the Tel Aviv beach when Josie Shlain drove past in a jeep and saw them. Learning of their predicament, he said "Why don't you join us"? They became members of his anti-tank unit.

Leo Camron, who had served as a captain in the S.A. Artillery Corps in World War II arrived a little later and joined the Israeli artillery. Another artillery specialist was Major Eric Behrman, who came with his wife Jeanne, a nurse. Joe Woolf became a member of the "Hativa Seven", a famous unit. Three Southern Africans - Reginald Sagor, Jimmy Hanley and Mike Isaacson were members of Moshe Dayan's commando. Eddie Russak, a radar expert, came with his wife Jane, a nurse, and installed all the radar stations between Haifa and Eilat after the British had left.

Another veteran from the S.A. Corps of Signals, Maurice Ostroff, became commander of the main IAF radar station. Several other Southern Africans joined the Signals Corps, among them Moshe Shapiro, who rose to the rank of major and Shaul Levinson (Bar Levav) who remained in the Signals Corps until 1956, setting up communications between Jerusalem and Israeli embassies abroad.

Charles Heller served in the Tank Corps and was wounded during the battles for the Negev. Jack Fleisch, an infantryman, was captured in action years later by the Egyptians, and was released in a prisoner-exchange during a truce.

Hillel "Bill" Daleski; Sidney Langbart; Melville Malkin; Elliot Kantzenellenbogen, Eddie and Masha Rosenberg; Norman Slotnik; Jack Segal and Max Barton and several pilots formed the first S.A. Mahal contingent to get to Palestine. Their Dakota landed at Lydda Airport on April 21, 1948. They actually had legal immigration certificates. On the day they landed, Lydda Airport was captured by the "Palmach". They found themselves in a chaotic situation. Fortunately they were picked up and taken to Tel Aviv by Ezer Weizman who recognised the pilots and put them up in a hotel.

Boris Senior, a veteran pilot from World War II went to Tel-Aviv in December 1947 and within three days, was flying in the "Sherut Avir" (Air service), precursor of the Israel Air Force. In February 1949 Senior was sent to South Africa to recruit air force personnel, to buy aircraft and to get both men and planes to Palestine in whatever way he could. Armed with a letter from the "General Council of Jewish Aviation in Palestine", he presented himself to the S.A. Zionist Federation.

He joined forces with Yoel Palgi, a famous Israeli paratrooper and they combed South Africa for planes and crews. In Kimberley they discovered 40 World War II Kittihawk planes about to be reduced to scrap. They could have purchased these for three or four British Pounds each, but there was no way to smuggle the planes out of South Africa. In the end they settled for 14 civilian aircraft.

Of the fourteen, two crashed on the flight to Israel and one was impounded by the Egyptians. The remaining civilian aircraft did sterling work despite their limited capabilities - they engaged in bombing missions, photographic reconnaissance, dropping of supplies and the maintenance of communications with besieged Jerusalem and isolated settlements. On bombing missions, the pilots simply opened the doors and windows and threw out the bombs. The planes were also used as gun platforms - machine-guns were fired out of the luggage compartments.

Danny Rosin, an experienced SAAF pilot, flew a Dakota from South Africa, but was compelled to go via Greece to Rome. There Daniel Agronsky, an Israeli representative, told him that a C46 purchased in Czechoslovakia - loaded with guns and other ammunition - had lost an engine and had been forced to crash-land at Treviso, Italy, where the crew had been imprisoned because the weapons were contraband. Agronsky gave Rosin "a ton of money", he flew to Venice and took a train from there to Treviso. He made a deal with the Italian authorities whereupon he was allowed to take the plane and to get the crew, Americans, out of jail. He was made to surrender the weapons and ammunition.

The plane was repaired, Rosin learned how to operate it and flew it to Zautec, Czechoslovakia to obtain more arms for transport to Israel. In Israel he found that Southern Africans Dov Judah and Smoky Simon "were running the show". They were responsible for getting Rosin appointed, together with a South African non-Jewish ex-SAAF volunteer Claude Duval to set up 103 squadron which bombed Gaza, Beersheba which was in Egyptian hands, and the Faluja pocket.

Several Southern Africans such as “Smoky” Simon, Dov Judah, Sid Cohen, Sid Kentridge, Leslie Shagham and Rolfe Futerman attained top positions in the Israel Air Force. Mandy Voss and Lou Maserow, who had been wireless operators in the SAAF, came to Israel in “Mahal” to serve the Israeli Air Force in that capacity. Other Southern African pilots who brought planes from South Africa and served in the Israel Air Force were Tuvia Blau, Les Chimes and Arthur Cooper. Syd Chalmers was chief technical officer of a Mosquito squadron; Zeev Zimmer and Chaim Grevler served in air crews.

At the end of the war, David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, paid a public tribute to the Southern African “Machalnicks” for their share in developing Israel’s Air force, Radar and Medical Corps.

Many pilots and air crew stayed on after military operations ended. Some were among the pioneers to join the newly created El Al. Thus hundreds of Southern African Mahal volunteers served with great distinction in the different army corps, including infantry, artillery, armour, signals, engineering and medical units.

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### **“Days of Awe - the Cape Town Experience”.**

**Excerpted from “A Litwak at the Cape, and Further,” –an autobiography by Haim Pogrud. (as yet, unpublished).**

We considered ourselves to be Orthodox Jews by all prevailing standards in the South African tradition. By definition in those days, this included keeping kosher at home, having separate utensils for the Passover, lighting the candles on Friday evenings, and going to the synagogue on the major festivals, and for my folks, Yahrzeit for their parents, of course. An occasional kiddush on Erev Shabbat and on festival eves completed the process. There were no kippot or ritual fringes to be seen, nor was there much superfluous hair except amongst the older generation.

We were members of the Vredehoek congregation or Beit HaMidrash Hachadash the successor to the old Constitution Street Shul, and the family had its fixed pews, with my father and Uncle Kalman seated next to each other while my cousin Alec sat behind them in the back row. I usually took pot luck on available seats until my Barmitzvah. We sat at the side and facing the Bimah, and of course also opposite our women who were upstairs in the gallery dressed in their finery and perfumed to the hilt. The services were fully choral on the festivals and shabbatot and we sang the great traditional Litwishe “nigunim” with feeling.

The U’n’taneh Tokef on Yom Kippur would wring the tears from the ladies in the gallery, and the sobs together with the nose blowing led by old Mrs. Kasimov, Mahzor pressed to her short sighted eyes, amongst others, added to the gravity of the day.

Hazzanim included Inspector, and Rudy over the years, with Lichterman holding the position for the greatest period. Lichterman, a small man, was a little prima donna -ish, and God help anybody who opened a window on a stifling Yom Kippur day to try to raise the oxygen level a fraction. He would stop singing, wrap his prayer shawl around his neck and mouth, and throw a malevolent look in the direction of the offending window and perpetrator. This was immediately banged closed by a 'Kammite' (Committee) Member' who was posted among the ladies, and the show would go on.

The Hazzan Sheini or "Ba'al Tefilah" was the magnificent Rev. Rabinowitz who for countless years sang perfectly in a pleasant voice. He read the torah without error or blemish and was totally unaffected by the surrounding "tummel". He was known as a "feine Yid" and was also the official "Shofar Blozzer", with the sounds undoubtedly reaching to the heavens on the Days of Awe.

The late and venerated Rabbi Chaim Mirvish was the spiritual leader of the congregation at the time, and a more respected Jew was hard to find. Uninvolved in the political intrigues and petty rows of the Shul "Kammite", he set the example for sincerity and integrity coupled with wisdom. They do not come like that any more.

The elders in the shul including Messrs. Koppel Sacks, Glick, Melamed, Sher and so on, would sit along the Eastern wall covered by their extensive "taleisim" and "shokkeling" like the best of them..

Dear God! What a rumpus was created if a mistake was made in the "trop" or in the text which was being read. Desks were banged, and voices were raised in cacophany until the correction was made. Simhat Torah and Purim were the two occasions when these people came into their own. On the former, tables were loaded with chopped, and pickled herring and Kichlach a la Lita, and "teiglach" made by the women's committee, while the 'Shnapps' flowed and conviviality reigned. It was a rollicking party and gave a boost to the Hakkafof or merriment with the completion of the reading of the law and starting it afresh. The team was completed by Mr. Ritz the shamash who had been one of my surgical bootmakers, but had given it up as it were, "to take the cloth"!

The day of Atonement presented the opportunity for us to tour the surrounding Synagogues, visit the museum and art gallery in the Gardens, and just sit under the oaks watching the passing show. In addition, one could take in the "talent" in the other Shuls. Of course, the Gardens Shul usually had the best choir, and was a social cut above the rest of the communities, at least as far as the external trappings of the members were concerned. The president, and executive wore top hats and morning suits led by old man Rabie. Our committee at the Vredehoek synagogue, I am afraid, could only manage Homburgs but were more than a match sartorially.

The one thing however that never palled or galled was the magnificence of the Gardens Shul itself. It had an awesomeness, both inside and out, which I have yet to find in another relatively modern place of worship of any denomination in any place. The choir and Boris Rome added their efforts to the dignity of the prayers. No wonder it was called "der Englischer Shul" by my parents' generation. Rabbi Israel Abrahams, in his pillbox headgear, fine, round, horn-rimmed spectacles, and goatee would deliver his regular sermon in his impeccable English and cast an occasional glance at his lady in an upper front corner of the "Ezrat Nashim".

The "Shammash" here happened to be Mr. Gordon, who was a true-blue "landsman" of my father from Abel as was Mr. Kuperman, a member of the Gardens Synagogue and a private Hebrew teacher for those who could afford it. We always managed to find a temporary seat with the formers help. Overflow, on the high festivals spilled into the "Old Shul" next door, the first Synagogue building in South Africa, and again, the atmosphere here could be inspiring. A tour of the National Art Gallery including the Meyerowitz carved doors, the adjacent South African Museum with its beautiful waxwork figures of local Bushman tribesmen, completed our visit to the Gardens.

On the way we would go to the Roeland Street Shul, of which a water colour by Leng Dixon, hangs just above and facing me on the wall while I write. Rabbi Kirzner was the spiritual leader here, and I remember him with clarity. He left just after the war, and the congregation transferred to "the Opera House" or the "Round Shul" in Schoonder Street, after most of the Jewish residents had departed the district for a more sumptuous lifestyle. One of the famous Kousewitzky brothers was the cantor here, probably the best in the country and always well worth listening to.

The two Seder nights of Pesach were usually spent with my Uncle and aunt Kalman and Tzipfel and their family. The old people were observant to a fault and as I mentioned previously, there was an extremely strong bond between my father and themselves and I cherish the memories of the time that we spent with these wonderful people. The Seder was completely traditional from the reading of the Haggadah to the necessary stewed prunes at the end of festive meals, which featured matzo and kneidlach for eight days at a stretch! In addition they made their own wine, which after four glasses, added levity and a feeling of having personally crossed the Red Sea, as well as personally beating the Egyptians, who up to their usual evil machinations, even after suffering ten plagues, had not been subdued!

At Rosh Hashanah my mother usually prepared a delicious spread of all the herrings, 'kichlach'- a sweetish, crispy, biscuit to go with them, taiglach, pletzlach, and ingberlach and so forth, for a "Brocha" held at our place for friends and relatives. They would take a break from the Shul service up the road to drink a Le'Haim to the New Year and to reiterate the hope that it would not be worse than the one that had just passed, and how on earth could it ever have been in a place like Cape Town!

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## MEMORIES

written in January 1982 by Yetta Cohen (Born Polliack) of Durban.

Source: Ada Greenblatt, New York, U.S.A.

I was born in Lithuania in a small town called Wasiliski on 14th August, 1898. Kovno (Kaunas) was the capital. Lithuania was annexed by Russia after a war.

My father, Aaron Polliack married Dora Lipschitz from Shadova, another town not far from Wasiliski. He went to a Russian School for a few years. He was intelligent and spoke Russian well. His parents, Avrom and Eta Polliack, lived opposite our house. They owned a restaurant and had six children, Aaron, David, Louis, Jennie (Gruskin), Ada (Lurie) and Hya (Kantor). Belle Gruskin and Dora Lurie were born in Wasiliski. The Kantors unfortunately lost six children in infancy. They could not get a doctor quick enough.

The Gruskins and Luries emigrated to Kittaning, Pennsylvania in the U.S.A. but the Kantors went to live in another town not far from us where they had three daughters. One was Shaul Ben David's mother. Shaul's parents died young, so the Kantors took Shaul and another unmarried daughter, Bertha, to live in what was then Palestine. The Kantor's third daughter, Rachel's husband also died young. She emigrated with her only little boy to Kittaning where she married her uncle Harry Lurie, whose wife Ada (Polliack) had died there. The boy was educated in Kittaning, married Ponce and became the Attorney-General in Pittsburgh where he also died young.

My parents had six children - John, Hymie, Becky, Yetta and Barney. We had a nice home there, just opposite our grandparents. There was a shul with a Rabbi there and also a big church not far from us. There were quite a number of Jewish people living not far from us. In those days the young men had to go to the Tsarist Army for many years. Rather than be conscripted, the men left this place for America or South Africa.

My father and his brothers, David and Louis, left for Cape Town where we had some friends. My father used to go to the country and sell goods to the farmers. When the Boer War started in 1899 my father's brothers left for the U.S.A. where their name became Pollock and my father returned to Russia. There was nothing much for him to do there so after a few years he went back to Cape Town, where he opened a shop in Hanover Street selling musical instruments, bicycles and toys.

While the three elder boys were growing up they were sent to schools in other bigger towns. When they were 13 or 14 years old, my father used to send for them one at a time. Friends who were travelling out on the ships took care of the boys. In Cape Town my father stayed at a Jewish hotel with the boys. They went to night school and helped my father in the shop during the day.

Now back to my upbringing. In our small town Wasiliski, we had a general store on the corner of a building near our house. The villagers came to buy at our shop especially on Sunday mornings after leaving the church. The three younger children, Becky, Barney and myself helped our mother serve the customers. There were other towns, some big, some small, near ours and we used to go there by cart and horse or by train.

When I was five years old, I went to Cheder as there were not enough boys to make up the class. I was there for a few years and learned to write Yiddish, my mother language and also to read Hebrew. When the three of us were older we took private lessons from a Polish organist who taught us to speak and write Polish fluently.

As time went on, it became too dangerous for my mother and us to live alone. There were many programs all over Russia. My mother decided to go and live in Shaduvo, a big town which had schools, shops, banks, a post-office and a big Shul. There were a large number of Jewish people living there as well as Gentiles.

However, the main reason for going there was my grandmother, Frume Lipschitz. She owned a big restaurant and was known as a very clever and capable woman all over the district even far away from Shaduvo. She had nine children, five daughters and four sons, and brought up all the children on her own as her husband had died young. The five daughters got married and went to live in different towns. Three sons, Max, Alexander and Herman went to Africa where Herman was killed.

The youngest son Yeine Lipschitz remained at home with her. He became a chemist and had seven children. During the Great War 1914-1918 he left for Johannesburg with all his family.

My mother was a clever woman. There was not a thing she could not do, cooking, baking and all kinds of fancy work. When we came to live in Shaduvo, my grandmother rented a pleasant house for us which was nicely furnished. Russian students taught us Russian, I also learned French and German as extra languages. I was very studious and read many good Russian books. I also took piano lessons.

After living for four years in Shaduvo, my father decided to bring my mother, Becky, Barney and myself out to South Africa and we arrived in Cape Town in 1909. My father had rented a lovely five roomed furnished house for us. It even had a piano and lots of antiques bought a sales at big houses in the suburbs.

The three of us were accepted at Normal College - Becky and I in standard 6, Barney in standard 4. I had to give up the other languages and concentrate on English and Dutch. I was very good at maths, which made up for my weak English. During this time, my brother Hymie was in the business which my father had moved to Darling Street. It was a big shop and they sold musical instruments, pianos. etc.

However, my brother became very ill with rheumatic fever. He was in bed for three months and died in 1914 at the age of 24. My mother was very upset over the loss of our Hymie, she developed heart disease, angina, and was very ill for many years. So Becky left school in standard 7 as well as Barney and went to help my father in the shop.

Becky went on holiday to Johannesburg where she stayed with Johnny who was already married. There she met Abraham Nofte, a great friend of my brother's. They married and went to live in Witbank where he had a store. I visited them many times. Johnny and Herman had left Cape Town as there was not enough work for them in my father's shop. They went to Middelburg, Cape, where they worked for my uncle Max Lipschitz who had a big store.

Herman was very ambitious to start their own business. As a very young man he traveled to America and met Thomas Edison, the inventor of the light bulb and gramophone. He managed to get the agency for gramophones in South Africa from him. We also got other agencies for pianos and refrigerators. On his return he and Johnny opened a shop in Kerk Street, Johannesburg. Later they built the large building in Eloff Street under the name of H. Polliack and Co. Ltd.

The business was known all over South Africa as well as in the U.S.A. and U.K. where they often went to buy. Branches were opened in Durban, Port Elizabeth and Pretoria. Barney at one time managed the Port Elizabeth branch. My brothers often visited Cape Town to supervise the branch there. They also built the big building in Adderley Street under the name of H. Polliack and Co.

After I matriculated at Normal College, I went to business college for a year, where I studied book-keeping, English, Afrikaans and correspondence, receiving certificates for them. After qualifying, I went to work in my father's shop as the book-keeper, but he got older, I virtually became the manageress over many assistants. Eventually I left the business.

During this time, my mother died and my father and I went to live in hotels. As my father aged, my brothers decided to send Philip to manage the Cape Town branch in 1925. He was also in the business of pianos and a great friend of my brothers. This is where I met Philip and I married him in 1927. My father built us a lovely house in Avenue Fresnaye, Sea Point. After retiring, he lived with us for many years until his death in 1934. He was wonderful to me all the years. I also looked after my mother until the very end. I worked in the shop, brought the books home at night, did all the selling and correspondence and helped my mother at home.

Now about Philip. His parents also left Russia during the pogroms, and settled in Glasgow, Scotland where they had six daughters and three sons. Harry, the eldest son left for South Africa where he got married and was an estate agent in Johannesburg. He eventually brought out Philip who started out dealing in pianos. His other brother Sammy, remained in Glasgow together with Kate, Leah and Dora, who never married. Fanny went to London and Lena and Mabel came to South Africa.

My younger brother Barney could never settle down here. He was very keen on America. He often went there and loved our American relations. When my father died, Johnny and Herman remained with the business, but Becky, Barney and myself were paid out. Barney started to deal in the Stock Exchange and eventually lost all his money. He was very good-natured and was wonderful to me before I got married and took me for holidays everywhere. He eventually died in New York in 1946 from heart trouble. He was only 50 years old.

When Philip became a director of the company, he often went to America and England on business, and after Andrew went to University I accompanied him most of the time. Philip had many business friends there who were always very friendly to us.

My brother Herman died in 1949, Johnny in 1965 and my sister Becky in 1976. Philip retired in 1963 when the business was taken over by another firm as Hymie Polliack, Herman's son, left the firm and went to live in England.

So, having plenty of spare time now, we travelled a good deal. We went to America a few times to see my family there, as well as South America, Europe, the Far East and Israel. In 1967 we sold the house in Cape Town and moved to Durban to be nearer Andrew who had married Cheryl. Philip died in 1971.

I thank God for still being here at my old age, although I had a very sad life. I have lost all my brothers and my sister and my parents (my mother was only 58 years when she died), but mainly losing my beautiful clever child, Leonard John aged 12, who was tragically drowned in the sea at Sea Point in 1942, and also at losing a stillborn baby girl.

I feel I have no regrets in leading my normal life. I have no enemies, I was friendly to all my relations and helpful to everyone as much as I could afford. I still have close friends, some for as long as 60 years, like Bloomie Lurie and many others.

I only pray to God that Andrew and his family keep well and that the children should be educated and have good characters and be kind to everyone.

YETTA COHEN

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## SOUTH AFRICAN LIVING IN THE AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK

Bubbles Segall

I was born in Cape Town and spent my childhood in Stellenbosch. I left South Africa for the first time in 1968 and spent two years in Israel. I returned to South Africa at the end of 1969 and commenced training as a nurse at the Victoria Hospital in Wynberg, Cape Town.

After completing my training, I had itchy feet again and decided to go to New Zealand where I spent a year. I then continued with my travels spending a year in Sydney. Australia then moved to the north of Australia – to Darwin in the Northern Territory. In those days, the rest of Australia looked on the Northern Territory as the last frontier – in fact some “southerners” still see the Northern Territory as the end of the earth! It is very far from the rest of Australia, expensive to get to and has a very hot, humid, wet, sticky climate for approximately six months of the year. You do get used to it!

The Northern Territory wasn't really settled until the late 1800s. The total Northern Territory population was less than 10,000 people until the sixties. The Territory played a major role in World War II when thousands of Australian and US troops were based here. Darwin was bombed more than 80 times by the Japanese, many were killed and civilians were evacuated down south. General McArthur was based at Birdum (approximately 500 kms south of Darwin) during key periods of the New Guinea campaign.

Darwin has another claim to fame – the whole city was entirely wiped out by Cyclone Tracy on Christmas Day 1974. I arrived in Darwin just over a year after the cyclone (April 1976). People were still living in makeshift accommodation and in caravans when I arrived. The whole city has since been rebuilt to withstand future cyclones.

I had been in Darwin for almost five years before I met my first Jewish family. I was employed as an audiometrist when a woman brought her son in for a hearing test. She was wearing a Magen David and her son's name was Dov! She hadn't been in Darwin long but had met up with some other Jewish families. They were meeting at different homes every Friday night for Shabbes. I joined the group and made some wonderful friends. I was the only South African amongst the group. The others were from Australia, England, New Zealand, America and Israel. We had our share of problems. At that time a sect calling themselves “Jews for Jesus” tried to infiltrate our Friday night Shabbes get-togethers. Also, our little group started falling apart – like any small group there were disagreements, some families left Darwin and the Friday night get-togethers stopped altogether.

The Jewish community in Darwin has never been very large. We have no synagogue, no Rabbi and no kosher butcher. One delicatessen sells matzah and matzah meal at Pesach and some other kosher delicacies now and again. Most of the Jewish population in Darwin is transient. Some are employed as doctors at Royal Darwin Hospital, some are employed as lecturers at the Northern Territory University and others are transferred here with their jobs in the government. None of them stay very long. As there is no Jewish Centre here, Jews come and go from Darwin without making contact with other Jews who are residents. Hopefully this is all about to change.

Last year I was living in a very remote Aboriginal community about 800 kilometres Southwest of Darwin where I was employed as a Remote Area Nurse. I had some leave and came to Darwin where my husband and I have our home. Whilst in Darwin, I bumped into one of my Jewish friends who, like me has lived in the Northern Territory for many years. He told me that the Lubavitcher Movement in Melbourne were sending some Yeshiva students up to Darwin to conduct the Pesach Seder.

I was astounded. I kept pumping him for information. "Are you sure that this isn't a hoax?" "Are you sure that they are not "Jews for Jesus" trying to get their foot in the door again?" I asked. "No" was his reply "Here is their phone number, ring them yourself." I did and the poor Yeshiva student at the other end must have wondered why he was being asked so many questions!! This was too good to be true. I had been in the Northern Territory for 25 years and had never seen anyone from the Lubavitcher movement here.

Evidently the year before (1999) Yeshiva students from Melbourne performed Pesach Seders in Cairns, in Queensland and in Darwin and a Shabbaton in Alice Springs (Northern Territory). Unfortunately I was unaware of their visit as I was living so far away from Darwin at the time.

I was intrigued to know why they made the trip in 1999 and why they were returning to conduct another Seder. From talking to the students and from reading about the Lubavitcher movement, I was able to satisfy my curiosity. Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe said that "It is written, 'The soul of man is the candle of G-d.' It is also written, 'A mitzvah is a candle, and the Torah is light'.

A chassid is one who puts his personal affairs aside and sets out to light up the souls of Jews with the light of Torah and mitzvot. Jewish souls are ready and waiting to be kindled. Sometimes they are close, nearby, sometimes they are in a desert or at sea. There must be someone who will forego his or her own comforts and conveniences, and reach out to light those lamps. This is the function of a true Chabad-Lubavitch chassid."

Well, the two Yesihva students, Shmuly and Noach (from America and studying in Melbourne), well and truly gave up their comforts and conveniences of home when they visited the Northern Territory. Firstly they had to raise the money for the trip to pay for travel expenses and accommodation. Secondly they had to bring all the food, wine, matzah. Thirdly they also brought cooking equipment, cutlery, crockery, books and mezuzahs. Evidently they filled 17 boxes which travelled with them on the plane. Fourthly, the weather in April is still quite humid and sticky which must have been very uncomfortable for them.

Thirty-five people came to the Seder including about 6 Israeli backpackers. Again, I was the only South African. I only knew a handful of people and soon made new friends. I was very moved by the experience and was fortunate enough to attend the Seder again this year which was much easier for me as I have moved from the remote community back to Darwin.

I now have a mezuzah on my front door, affixed by Shmuly and Noach and I think I have the most northerly mezuzah in Australia! Other Jewish families in Darwin may have mezuzahs affixed to their doorposts, but I live on the other side of Darwin Harbour which is the most northern part of Darwin.

I was curious to know how Shmuly and Noach first made contact with our small Jewish community. They told me that they had a phone number of a Jewish family who used to live here a long time ago. They rang the number and was told that the lady had passed away. They managed to contact her son and after many phone calls later, they were able to organise a Seder.

I am now hoping that those of us who attended the Seders can meet on a more regular basis throughout the year, and not just at Pesach and also make contact with any new families moving to Darwin.

In the next installment I hope to tell you of some of my experiences as a Remote Area Nurse in the Northern Territory. The real outback of Australia.

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## **WELCOME**

This issue concludes with a particular note of welcome to the following new members;

**Sam Aaron, Nancy Felson Brant, Hazel Dakers, Sam Graff,**

**Errol Gross, Warren Mandelbaum, Miriam Margolyes,**

**Marion Newman, Beverly Oldsberg, Davida Pincus, Ralph Simon,**

**Connie Steele, Naomi Stone, Susan Weiner.**

We look forward to their involvement and participation in the exciting and important work ahead.

**Renewal forms are included for other members – a prompt response would be appreciated.**

Many thanks,  
Mike Getz.