

# SA-SIG

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*<http://www.jewishgen.org/SAfrica/>*

## *Southern African Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group Newsletter*

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The genealogists interested in South Africa are a diverse lot, some Jewish, some non-Jewish. Some live in SA, others are expats or have had SA family in the past. One common factor in many (but not all) is that the majority have had some Litvak connections in the past.

For those in SA who will have seen the *Who Do You Think You Are* documentary around Zapiro, a prominent political cartoonist, first aired in SA on September 20<sup>th</sup>, the connections are clearly shown. This was very ably produced by Sara Blecher and directed by Andy Spitz. There is a lot devoted to Zapiro in Lithuania, especially Plungian, and the process of emigration from Lithuania to South Africa is well illustrated. Zapiro is very articulate and discusses the *Shoah* in terms of "if my ancestors had not emigrated this is what would have happened".

There are a few books that are also mainly about Litvaks. One is by a retired neurologist, Mark Ozer, titled *The Litvak Legacy* ([www.thelitvaklegacy.com](http://www.thelitvaklegacy.com)). He has researched Litvaks in minute detail and divides the book into three parts: The Litvak Homeland, The English-speaking Litvak Diaspora, and The Hebrew-speaking Litvak Diaspora. For anyone wanting an in-depth background to Litvaks, this book is recommended.

Prof. Dovid Katz in *Words on Fire: The Unfinished story of Yiddish* (Basic Books, 2004) also has a lot devoted to Lithuanian Jews and is a scholarly but easily readable text. He is predominantly a Yiddish scholar but has lived and taught in Lithuania for some time and has a very good grasp of our heritage there.

I have also just read a remarkable book by Kevin Bloom, *Ways of Staying* (Picador, 2009). This was written by the author after his cousin was murdered, and is a very personal analysis of post-apartheid South Africa, the violence, the hatreds, the politics, and his own personal rationale for staying on in South Africa. Despite all the evil, he concludes that there is a lot of good and goodwill, and his affection for the country and the people clearly comes over. I thoroughly recommend this to anyone interested in the realities of living in South Africa today.

Watching my grandson play soccer in Regents Park today, I was very conscious of the privileges that we

### The Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group (SA-SIG)

The purpose and goal of the Southern Africa Special Interest Group (SA-SIG) is to bring together Jewish genealogy researchers with a common interest in Southern Africa and to provide a forum for a free exchange of ideas, research tips and information of interest to those researching Jewish family history in the communities of South Africa, Lesotho (Basutoland), Botswana (Bechuanaland), Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia), Zambia (Northern Rhodesia), Swaziland, Mozambique, Kenya, and the former Belgian Congo.

The SIG has been producing a quarterly Newsletter since 2000 in which is included articles on personalities in the Southern African Jewish community, religious congregations, communities – past and present and general news about the lives our Southern African families led.

Further information on how to subscribe to the Newsletter can be found at:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/SAfrica/newsletter/index.htm>

If you would like to contribute articles to the Newsletter, accounts should include descriptions of families of the community, aspects of local Jewish life, its institutions and particular character. Jewish involvement in the community at large, its history, business life and development could be featured as well.

Articles for printing in the Newsletter should be sent to Colin Plen, Editor, at [colplen@iafrica.com](mailto:colplen@iafrica.com)

General enquiries about the Newsletter can be sent either to Colin or to Mike Getz at [MikeGetz005@comcast.net](mailto:MikeGetz005@comcast.net)

The SA-SIG maintains a set of Web Pages that can be found at: <http://www.jewishgen.org/safrica>

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have, occasioned by the brave changes and sacrifices that our ancestors made to facilitate the progress our families have made over the past few generations.

**Saul Issroff**

London, [saul@issroff.com](mailto:saul@issroff.com)

**Appeal for information for a project on the Jews of Latvia**

The activity of the Riga Religious Community *Shamir* is aimed at commemorating the memory of Latvian Jews. Our most significant project is a Latvian Jewish Encyclopedia which will gather information about all the Jews connected to Latvia. It will be a memorial for the Latvian Jews who do not exist now.

We have already gathered more than 2,500 biographic and thematic entries which covers half of the proposed number. The project covers the period from 1561 to 1991. We are looking for Jews originally from Latvia, but living abroad.

If you have any information about such people in your area or know any archives, please contact Victoria Shaldova, executive director of the Jewish Community, *Shamir*, Riga, Latvia.

E-mail: [shamir@apollo.lv](mailto:shamir@apollo.lv)

Web: [www.shamir.lv/en](http://www.shamir.lv/en)

**EDITORIAL**

On behalf of my wife, and my family, and the backroom folks of this Newsletter, I wish you and yours a very Happy 5770, and may each of you have a meaningful Fast. Also, if the Newsletter reaches you in the New Year, accept the wishes as if they had arrived before the New Year, please.

We are coming up to the Muizenberg exhibition from December 16<sup>th</sup>. The organizers are building up a very worthwhile show, and they are still looking for anything that you can contribute to reviving the memory of Muizenberg at its height as a Jewish centre.

A book I read a while ago, titled *Everything is Illuminated*, was noteworthy in its novelty to show the tragedy of our loss of our people in Europe with a comic aspect of how people research their lineage. I have reviewed it (if that is the correct word for a book that has been on the shelves for a few years) which can be found in this issue.

Mr Gary Feitelberg did an interesting study into the immigration of his family and we are using his article this month.

The late Bernhard Herzberg is remembered in a sensitively worded essay.

Following up on my article in the last Newsletter, I am particularly delighted with the rash of items giving thoughts and ideas on the origins and meanings of surnames. No less than 4 people added their suggestions, and their inputs can be found in this issue.

The Annual IAJGS Conference on Jewish Genealogy held recently in Philadelphia was its usual success and we include a brief resume of the SA-SIG session in this issue.

**Colin Plen**

*Editor*

Cape Town, South Africa

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**SOUTHERN AFRICAN SPECIAL  
INTEREST GROUP (SA-SIG)  
MEETING AT THE 2009  
PHILADELPHIA IAJGS  
INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM  
ON JEWISH GENEALOGY**

*Roy Ogus*

One of the Southern African discussion sessions at the recent IAJGS Symposium on Jewish Genealogy, held in Philadelphia in August 2009, was the SA-SIG Group meeting. The session was well attended – 22 people were present, and 5 attendees signed up as new members or renewed their subscriptions to the SA-SIG at the close of the meeting.

The meeting was run by Roy Ogus and Saul Issroff, with SA-SIG Board members Rose Lerer Cohen, Ed Goldberg, and Ann Rabinowitz also in attendance.

During the first part of the session, a number of topics describing the SA-SIG activities were presented, after which followed a general discussion and question-and-answer session. The presentation topics presented commenced with an overview of the Mission and key activities of the SA-SIG, followed by a review of the comprehensive set of Web pages which contain a wealth of information and resources. Attendees were also encouraged to participate in the SA-SIG Internet discussion group, run under the auspices of JewishGen. Following these topics the highlights of the excellent on-line database, the South African Jewish *Rootsbank*, were presented.

The *SA-SIG Newsletter* has been published quarterly since 1999, and the publication covers a wide range of topics relating to the Southern African Jewish communities, both in Southern Africa, as well as in other parts of the world. Further information about the Newsletter, as well as directions of how to subscribe to the publication, can be found at:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/safrica/newsletter/>

The *South African Jewish Rootsbank* database was created by the Centre for Jewish Migration and Genealogy Studies in Cape Town. The Centre is managed under the umbrella of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Institute for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town, and will also provide a public access

section located at the South African Jewish Museum.

The key mission of the project is to create a comprehensive database of records and information relating to Jewish immigration to South Africa. The project plans to eventually document the estimated 15,000 core families who migrated to Southern Africa between 1850-1950 from England, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus.

The research on the project has focussed on the locations where the families originated, their patterns of migration to South Africa, where the families first settled, what communities they established after arrival, the growth of families, their subsequent movements within the country, and the later emigration of many of the families abroad. A wide array of source documentation has been consulted including passenger arrival lists, naturalization lists, community records, vital records of marriages, births and deaths, family trees, as well as many others.

A comprehensive collection of records has been integrated into the database, which can be searched on-line at:

[http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/CGI/cgi\\_Rootweb.exe](http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/CGI/cgi_Rootweb.exe)

Following the presentation, the meeting was opened up as a general session during which a lively discussion ensued with an interesting exchange of information between the attendees. Saul Issroff reported that the *Rootsbank* database would shortly be updated with new records, including the data from early Cape Town *Ketubbot* dating from around 1890, as well as the images from Union Castle Hamburg indirect passenger lists for voyages via London and Southampton from around 1896-1905.

In summary, SA-SIG group session served to re-emphasize and renew interest in the activities of the SIG. Contributions are solicited from all members of the group for Newsletter articles, as well as for volunteers to help with the various SA-SIG projects. Please contact any members of the Board if you would like to contribute your services. The Board member names can be found on the SA-SIG Web pages at: <http://www.jewishgen.org/Safrica>

## SA-SIG TREASURER'S REPORT

July 2008 – June 2009

Mike Getz

The opening balance for the SA SIG was \$676. The closing balance at June 2009 totaled \$714. Expenditure on mailing and printing was approximately \$325 and membership income for the year totaled \$450. The small surplus of \$125 resulted after supplying requested mailed copies to academic and genealogical organization in the US and Israel, without charge.

I want to acknowledge the fine work of Bubbles Segall during her years as Editor. She organized splendid material to a scrupulous deadline. I look forward to her involvement with the SIG.

I would like to welcome our new Editor Colin Plen. His first issue was alive with quality and interest, which really presented and read well. We look forward to his tenure, especially with his advantage of being close to "home."

Roy Ogus, our Vice-President, has been mentor and manager in getting us to press. He has assiduously kept us to a high and consistent standard, with patience and indulgence to accommodate the broad interests of our activity. Additionally he has handled our considerable cyber traffic as well as tending to the global flow of traffic on our communities.

Our President Saul Issroff continues to promote our interests as he does for Jewish genealogy at large. He is now a member of the executive board of the IAGS, well-earned recognition of his work in our chosen field.

I apologize for my absence at the Conference and hope our membership and attendants had a successful and fulfilling Conference. Thanks as well to our members for their ongoing involvement and support.

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## FEITELBERG FAMILY From Litvakland to South Africa

Gary Feitelberg

*Gary Feitelberg is a family historian/genealogist researching his Latvian and Lithuanian roots, particularly the FEITELBERG, HILLMAN, KULMAN and ZIMAN families with branches in South Africa and neighboring countries.*

Pronounced "Faitelberg" with a Litvak accent and dialect, they came by way of shelters and ships to South Africa from Latvia and Lithuania. They made their way to Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria. Some became rich and super successful while others seemed to struggle for survival. These are their brief biographies and stories.

First stop on my research destination to discover the details was *The Poor Jews Temporary Shelter* computer database. This database lists seven Feitelberg family members:

- A. Feitelberg  
ID No. 16535. Ref. No. 503.  
Date Entered – 6/30/1896.  
Date Left: July 10, 1896. 11 Day Stay.  
Age: 39. Birthplace: Kovno.  
Marital Status: Married. No. of Children: 3.  
Place from: Libau. Occupation: Merchant.  
Place to: Africa. Ship: Trojan.  
Note: Possibly with one child. "These brought no vouchers."
- L. Feitelberg  
ID No. 16539. Ref. No. 502.  
Date Entered – 6/30/1896.  
Date Left: July 10, 1896. 11 Day Stay.  
Age: 13. Birthplace: Kovno.  
Marital Status: Single.  
Place from: Libau. Occupation: None.  
Place to: Africa. Ship: Trojan.  
Note: "These brought no vouchers."
- R. Feitelberg  
ID No. 50587. Ref. No. 1562.  
Date Entered – 6/29/1899.  
Date Left: 6/30/1899. 11 Day Stay.  
Age: 33. Birthplace: Kovno.  
Marital Status: Married. No. of Children: 1.

Place from: Libau. Occupation: Dealer.  
Place to: Africa. Ship: Scot.

- R. Feitelberg  
ID No. 1691. Ref. No. 2030.  
Date Entered – 6/29/1899.  
Date Left: 6/30/1899. 11 Day Stay.  
Age: 33. Birthplace: Kovno.  
Marital Status: Married. No. of Children: 1.  
Place from: Libau. Occupation: Dealer.  
Place to: Africa. Ship: Scot.  
Note: This appears to be a duplicate entry for the above individual.
- M. Feitelberg  
ID No. 1691. Reg Volume: 5.1. Ref. No. 315.  
Date Entered – 11/14/02.  
Date Left: 11/19/1902. 6 Day Stay.  
Age: 26. Birthplace: Kovno.  
Marital Status: Single. No. of Children: 1  
Place from: Libau. Occupation: Boot Maker.  
Place to: Africa. Ship: Lismore Castle.  
Note: Came on ship Kursk.
- A. Feitelberg  
ID No. 81241. Reg Volume: 6. Ref. No. 4161.  
Date Entered – 9/12/03.  
Date Left: 9/15/1903. 5 Day Stay.  
Age: 42. Birthplace: Courland.  
Marital Status: Single. No. of Children: 1  
Place from: Libau. Occupation: Dealer.  
Place to: Africa. Ship: Raglan Castle.
- L. Feitelberg  
ID No. 81243. Reg Volume: 6. Ref. No. 4162.  
Date Entered – 9/12/03. Date Left: 9/15/1903. 5 Day Stay.  
Age: 20. Birthplace: Courland.  
Marital Status: Single. No. of Children: 1  
Place from: Holland. Occupation: Dealer.  
Place to: Africa. Ship: Raglan Castle.

On JewishGen, a computer database called the *South African Jewish Year Book Database* contains an index to over 1,000 biographies of Jews in South Africa, from publications in 1929 and 1945. These include the rich and successful members of my *mishpocha*. Included are the following four members of my Feitelberg family:

- Apparently, the earliest known Feitelberg Litvak settler to South Africa was Maurice

Feitelberg during 1895. He settled in Johannesburg. Married Nettie Browse during 1901. Born 1875 in Great Grimsby, England. Occupation: Grain Dealer

- Joseph J. Feitelberg. Arrived in Durban during 1897. Married Ray Friedman during 1904. Born in Hull, England 1879. Occupation: Jeweler – Strand Jeweler.
- Mark Feitelberg. Arrived in Durban during 1897. Married Edith Springer during 1910. Born in Hull, England 1883. Occupation: Agricultural Implement Representative
- Last, but definitely not least was Joseph Feitelberg. Arrived in Berea 1904. Married Dora Konigfest 1909. Born 1882 in Piltene, Latvia. Occupation: Produce Merchant – D Kingsbury & Co.

Another tremendous resource and source of valuable information is the **South African Jewish Rootsbank** database, which has been developed by the Centre for Jewish Migration & Genealogy Studies in Cape Town. Its web-site is:

[http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/CGI/cgi\\_Rootweb.exe](http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/CGI/cgi_Rootweb.exe)

The primary aim of the project is to research the estimated 15,000 core families who migrated to Southern Africa between 1850 and 1950 from England, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus, with the following goals:

- to map the entire history of Jewish migration to South Africa with the aim of providing authoritative and definitive data for the Discovery Centre at the South African Jewish Museum (SAJM)
- to integrate the genealogical data in multi-disciplinary research initiatives under the auspices of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre at the University of Cape Town

This computer database includes valuable information regarding our ancestors and family. from births, cemeteries, communities, congregations, deaths and estates, marriages, military records, naturalizations, passenger arrivals, ship manifests and much, much more. Our focus shall be on those latter resources and sources.

### *Naturalizations (1982-1987 & Pretoria)*

Unfortunately, no Feitelberg was listed as being naturalized.

### *Passenger Arrival Lists*

These comprise the passenger arrival lists for 1924-1929 and 1936, and a List of Emigrants 1920-1930:

- Isaac Feitelberg and wife are listed from the List of Emigrants 1920-1930. Occupation: No Trade. Occupied Edinburgh Castle. 6/20/22 for 2 Day.
- Shalom Feitelberg is listed from the List of Emigrants 1920-1930. Occupation: Watchmaker. Occupied Durham Castle. 6/3/30 for 2 Days.

### *Ship Manifests 1890-1930*

- S. Feitelberg. Age: 25. Occupation: Miner.  
Official No.: 104827. Contract Ticket No. 62.  
Name of Ship: Arundel Castle.  
Departure Date: August 6, 1895.  
Destination Port: Cape Town.  
Source: Shipping Manifest 1895-1905.
- A. Feitelberg. Age 39. Occupation: Trader.  
Official No.: 82404.  
Name of Ship: Trojan.  
Departure Date: November 7, 1896.  
Destination Port: Cape Town.  
Source: Shipping Manifest 1895-1905.
- C. Feitelberg. Age 40. Occupation: Joiner.  
Official No.: 113334.  
Name of Ship: Galician.  
Departure Date: March 21, 1903.  
Destination Port: Cape Town.  
Source: Shipping Manifest 1895-1905
- Master Feitelberg. Age 3. Occupation: Nil.  
Mrs. T. Feitelberg. Age 30. Occupation: Nil  
Official No.: 110265.  
Name of Ship: Galeka.  
Departure Date: May 9, 1903.  
Destination Port: Cape Town.  
Source: Shipping Manifest 1895-1905.
- Miss A. Feitelberg. Age 11. Occupation: Nil.  
Official No.: 98174.

Name of Ship: Doune Castle.  
Departure Date: January 29, 1904.  
Destination Port: Cape Town.  
Source: Shipping Manifest 1895-1905.

- Heimann Feitelberg. Age 26. Occupation: Nil.  
Official No.: 118387.  
Name of Ship: Durham Castle.  
Departure Date: May 15, 1912.  
Destination Port: Cape Town.  
Class of Passage: Third.  
Port of Arrival in Europe: London.  
Steamship Line to UK: United Shipping Company.  
Original Country: Russia.  
Source: Shipping Manifest 1906-1916.
- Arne Feitelberg. Age 52. Occupation: Nil.  
Bluma Feitelberg. Age 17. Occupation: Clerk.  
Pauline Feitelberg. Age 21. Occupation: Nil  
Official No. 118387.  
Name of Ship: Durham Castle.  
Departure Date: December 15, 1920.  
Destination Port: Cape Town.  
Class of Passage: Third.  
Port of Arrival in Europe: London.  
Original Country: Latvia.  
Source: Shipping Manifest 1916-1920.
- Isaac Feitelberg. Age 21. Occupation: Shop assistant.  
Chava Feitelberg. Age 23. Occupation: Nil.  
Official No. 129088.  
Name of Ship: Edinburgh Castle.  
Departure Date: October 6, 1922  
Destination Port: Cape Town.  
Class of Passage: Third.  
Port of Arrival in Europe: London.  
Original Country: Latvia.  
Source: Shipping Manifest 1921-1924.

These emigration records are by no way complete but give us a great glimpse and insight into emigration from Litvakland to South Africa. From them we gather a better understanding from where we came, both figuratively and literally speaking. These records can serve as the basic foundation of our family history and genealogy research with an eye to adding additional information from other types of documentary evidence to pay special tribute to the South African settlers.

## MORE ON THE MEANINGS OF SURNAMES

*In Colin Plen's article in the June 2009 Newsletter, The Meanings of Surnames, he encouraged readers to submit their own thoughts and ideas on the origins and meanings of surnames. The following four communications have been received.*

### **The Surname Lurie**

*Bubbles Segal, Australia*

Like you I am fascinated by surnames. My paternal grandmother was a Lurie and here are quite different origins of the surname. The first one I found was in *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*, by Alexander Beider, published by Avotaynu, Inc.

The surname LURIE comes from Pinsk, common in Mogilev, Kiev, Rovno, and Novograd. Related surnames are: Lur'ev, Lur'i, Lur'ya, Luri, Lurie, Luriev, Lurik, Luriya, Lyur'e, Lyurej, Lyurie, Lyurij, Lyurik, Lyuriya, Lorie, Lorio.

Perhaps the name derives from the town of Luria (Province of Treviso, Italy). Due to religious persecution, the Jews of Luria left Italy for Germany and thence went to Poland, Lithuania and Russia.

This interpretation comes from the Nachum Goldman Museum of the Jewish Diaspora:

The name could derive from Loria, a town near Bassano in the Province of Vicenza, Italy. Whilst the name Luria appears in 15<sup>th</sup> century Alsace, the form "Lurie" is mentioned as a Jewish family name in 1664 with Gabriel Lurie at Hamburg in Germany.

The surname Lurie (the traditional Roman alphabet spelling of this name) is known since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The founder of the East European branch of this family was Jehiel Luria, who moved from Germany to Eastern Europe about 1470 (he died in Lithuania).

Another suggestion came from one of my relatives who was told this by her father: The name Lurie is derived from the Loire River when a certain doctor saved a French king's life and was rewarded with an estate on the banks of that river.

So, the surname Lurie could come from all these explanations.

### **Surnames: Lapid and Lapidot**

*Ron Lapid, Israel*

As I think I mentioned previously, we chose the name LAPID both because of the several sounds that overlap with my original name LIPSCHITZ, and because I liked the connotation of the meaning: torch, light, etc.

I know very little about the name LAPIDOT (Hebrew) or LAPIDUS/LAPIDES (Yiddish?). LAPIDOT is a fairly common surname in Israel. The plural of Lapid is Lapidot.

What I managed to find out is the following:

"There are two theories to the origin of the name Lapidus/Lapidot. The first is thought to be derived from the Latin word for stone, *Lapidas*. There were many members of the Ancient Roman Consul with the name *Lepidus* and *Lapidus*. Lapidot/Lapidus was also the husband of Devorah the judge and prophetess in the *Tanach*."

I hope this throws some light on the subject.

### **Aleksandrovsk**

*Ada Gamsu, Johannesburg*

For your information, the town of Neustadt Tavrigh from which my Gordon family originates was known as Aleksandrovsk in Russian. In about 1930 the name was changed to Neustadt Tavrigh and its various derivatives. A famous person from this town was Sammy Marks.

There is also a place called Alensandrovol / Aleksandrovo in the Raseiniai (Rokishok) district. This is the town where my Yalovetsky family originates.

Hope this helps you.

### **Dutch Surnames**

*Ron van der Horst, USA*

As I have developed in genealogy, I have learnt to take what others have claimed to be the truth with a pinch of salt. Verification is necessary – always! Much of what is passed around by word of mouth is not true and much of what is published is also not true.

Don't be bluffed about surnames in the Netherlands in the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century. The vast majority (99%) maybe had no last names. Jews most certainly did



*not*. It was the Napoleonic code which required by law that every person throughout Europe in the French Empire (and this involved nearly the whole of Europe) take on last names.

I have a copy of a passport issued by French authorities to Mozes (ben) Salomon in the Netherlands, and this same man was issued another passport later (both bear his signature since obviously he could write scripted text). In a subsequent tax return he signed his name again in the same handwriting, twice as Mozes Salomon (1807 and 1812), and the third time (1816) as Mozes Salomon van der Horst, since he had adopted the last name of van der Horst as his surname. Why he took the name and whence it came from is a whole story of a different nature.

If anyone is interested in copies of these documents, I will gladly send them on to you.

I have a copy (published in a Dutch Jewish book) of the Code of Napoleon (abbreviated naturally) in French and Dutch, requiring that surnames be adopted. This document was found in a wallet of a dead individual in about 1840 or so.

So what you stated in the latest issue of the SA-SIG Newsletter, and information provided by some Dutchman is merely hearsay.

I trust that you will regard my comments as an exercise in education rather than criticism.

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## **THE LATE BERNHARD HERZBERG**

*Paul Herzberg*

*Paul Herzberg is an actor and writer. His play, The Dead Wait, in which he performed at The Royal Exchange in Manchester, is based on his experiences as a conscripted soldier in the Angolan border war, has been nominated for and won various awards, and is shortly to be a film.*

My father, Bernhard Herzberg, was always eccentric. Growing up in South Africa in a lower-middle class white suburb, he seemed out of place: suede jacket, black beret, German accent and notoriously left wing. On the few occasions he attended my rugby matches it was excruciating. His interaction with the bowls-playing, apartheid-

supporting white parents was invariably combative. But as the years passed, I came to value this otherness more and more; and by the time he died two years ago I had long since learned to cherish it.

His life was dramatic. Born to a wealthy Hanoverian Jewish family, he was a socialist by the age of twelve. One day my grandparents came home to find the cook sitting at the kitchen table with her arms folded and the evening meal unprepared. When questioned, she informed them that young Bernhard (then 12 years old) had instructed her to go on strike because her wages were too low.

This familial conflict was to end tragically in 1933. When my father's twin-sister tried to commit suicide, my grandfather was too ashamed to visit her in hospital. My dad spread the word about what a hypocrite my grandfather was and when he returned one night from the hospital he found that the locks had been changed on the doors and that he had been disinherited. He also tried to warn my grandfather that the Nazis were hell-bent on a world war, but this fell on deaf ears.

My father found sanctuary in South Africa, one of the only countries accepting Jewish refugees at the time. He spent the next fifty-two years there, highly active in the anti-apartheid movement. When he came to join my mother in the UK in 1985 he was already 76 years old. He started a new business and retired at the age of 82.

Still possessing enormous energy, he decided to study. This drive was spurred, in part, by his late father. My father had been forced to leave school at fifteen by my grandfather, who said to him that he would never amount to anything and should choose a simple vocation. Those words had a marked effect on my father and the older he got, the more he quoted them. It reinforced my belief at how important parental input is in the educational process.

From the moment he began to study, he applied himself with the same kind of zeal he always had with anything he undertook. But he did things his own way. Academic guidelines were anathema to him and he would answer questions in the way he chose to and ignore the clearly delineated structural requirements because he quibbled with most of them. No matter how often his friends or I would point out to him that he was putting himself at a severe disadvantage, he persisted.

His first degree was in German literature. He studied for this through the Open University in Britain and it took him a decade but he finally got there. He had stopped speaking German at the age of twenty-three, but he had continued to read books in German. Books! Our house groaned with the things. These were my father's treasures. Every book had his signature in it, the year, and was numbered. It was due to my parents' determination that I should read and the fact that I was privileged to have such an extensive library in our home that the deep limitations of the South African educational system were circumvented.

Next, he turned to refugee studies at the University of East London at the age of 92. He was surrounded by Somalis, Iraqis, Nigerians, and Pakistanis and was never happier than when doing this course. He said he always felt like a refugee and had a special understanding of what it meant to be displaced and homeless.

He inspired his fellow students. During this period of study he also helped start the *Stop the War* coalition in Muswell Hill, north London. Come rain or shine, he could be seen outside Barclays Bank of a Saturday morning collecting signatures. He always stood. Sometimes I would drive by and see him shivering but he refused a chair or extra clothing. People, especially the young, loved talking to him. He was inspiring to them.

Having acquired his M.A. in refugee studies at 95, he began to search for another course. My mother and I attempted to discourage him. He only travelled by public transport. The thought of taking a taxi was appalling to him. I came to understand that this obduracy was what kept him young. He sometimes came back from functions alone, at 11 pm at night. It scared the hell out of us but on he went.

He couldn't understand the Internet (though he kept complaining that he didn't have e-mail.) He worked on a PC, which constantly gave him problems. This was due to the fact that the finer points of the technology confused him. His saintly friend, Robin, and on occasion, I, would come round to rescue him. He managed to do the most convoluted things on his computer and files with valuable information kept disappearing. Entire essays would have to be rewritten. But on he ploughed.

He started an M.A. in African History and Politics at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the

University of London in 2005, with a dissertation on apartheid. He was 96. This entailed daily trips into SOAS. By this time he was frail. During the course he had to undergo a prostatectomy. This did not daunt him. One day I realised what now fired this determination: he had to complete the course before he died.

During these last years he received a lot of publicity. He was awarded "The Oldest Learner in the UK" award. A lecturer suggested he should approach the Guinness Book of Records, to which my father's retort was: "What purpose would it serve?" Many young people, fired up by my father's determination to keep on studying at such an advanced age, responded to articles about my father on the Internet.

During one lecture my father got into a disagreement with a tutor about an event seventy years earlier. Finally my father blurted out in frustration: "But I was there!"

My mother died in 2006. It hit him hard. They had always had a tempestuous marriage but he seemed to realise how important she'd been to him, such a constant support.

Over this period I tried to help him as much as I could. This meant reading his essays and his dissertation on apartheid. It was difficult because the academic requirements were rigorous. Without interfering with content, once again, Robin and I tried to point out what he needed to do: bibliography, footnotes, cross-referencing. The dissertation kept vanishing from his desktop and he would start all over again (having had a good yell beforehand.)

He was a complete inspiration over this period, indeed, a force of nature. Never giving up. Sitting at his desk from morning to night.

BBC Radio got to hear about him and he was invited to be interviewed by John Humphreys. I waited in the anteroom while this took place. I could hear them. It took a while to get him going but Humphreys was brilliant. My father was always dry and provocatively monosyllabic when he was questioned about his achievements, but finally he opened up and it was very moving.

In May 2007, I received a call in the morning at work. My father had died in his sleep. We found the PC still on, the cursor blinking on the last page of

his dissertation. I printed it off after the funeral and sent it in to SOAS. Three months later I was notified that he had passed and had been awarded a posthumous Master of Arts in African Politics and History. When he died, he did not know what the result of his dissertation would be.

He received obituaries in all the mainstream newspapers. There has been a huge amount of publicity about him, especially on the net. He has motivated a lot of people to return to study and been a powerful source of inspiration to those leaving school and entering higher education for the first time. He proved my grandfather wrong. My father was certainly no fool. He was the oldest student in the world to have acquired a third degree at the age of ninety-seven.

On 21<sup>st</sup> of July of last year, I was proud to accept that third degree on his behalf. SOAS conferred a special honour upon him. The only other person that year to receive such an honour was the actor Michael Palin.

On 21st June 2009, my father would have been one hundred years old.

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## ***Book Review***

### **EVERYTHING IS ILLUMINATED by Jonathan Safran Foer**

*Colin Plen*

*Editor's Note: I have no financial interest in this book. I am interested in the study of genealogy and also I have an avid sense of humour, and someone who knows me well gave the book to me. The book was published by Perennial, an imprint of Harper Collins, in 2002.*

It is the story of a young American who travels to the Ukraine to search for his ancestral *shtetl*. He has contracted a driver (who cannot drive properly or read a map at all), a guide and interpreter (who uses a thesaurus for any conversation in pidgin English), and a car which has seen better days many years before.

The story is written with alternate chapters giving the history of the *shtetl* and the author's family, then the story of the meeting of the guide, the driver and

the American Jew, written by the guide in his "English".

Example: "... My legal name is Alexander Perchov. But all of my friends dub me Alex because that is the more flaccid-to-utter version of my legal name. Mother dubs me Alexi-stop-spleening-me because I am always spleening her. If you want to know why I am always spleening her it is because I am always elsewhere with friends and disseminating so much currency and performing so many things that can spleen a mother ..."

From being very funny at the start, the story eventually builds up to a heart-rending clash as old memories are shocked into the present.

The people of the *shtetl*, for instance, get hold of week-old newspapers which advise of the advance of the Nazi troops, and mention that many Jews are handing themselves over to the Nazis because the Ukrainian populace is treating them so badly. Surely the Nazis cannot be as bad as the Ukrainians?

Many people who study genealogy find a difficulty in that their subject *shtetl* has different names. "... an irascible magistrate in Lvov had demanded a name for the nameless *shtetl*, that the name would be used for new maps and census records. ... The Jews had called it Trachimbrod but the squire's name was Sofiowka N, so after an all day referendum the squire decided that the name was Sofiowka. Some Jews even called the town Not-Sofiowka. But it was official."

As the American hero reaches his destination, personalities which had disappeared over five decades are re-awoken and truths are faced, with shocking results.

I recommend the reading of the book as an experience both for the person who simply wants to enjoy a different sort of novel, and for a person learning about genealogy.

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## EDITOR'S MUSINGS

Colin Plen

### Family Tree Sites

Is it my imagination or have Family Tree sites suddenly blossomed more than they did previously? My brother signed us up for the *Geni.com* site, and my brother in law signed up my wife for the *MyHeritage.com* site. I think that in the old days (i.e. read: last year) you had to buy a programme but now there is a plethora of them being made available, free (until you ask for an upgrade).

My problem is to find out how to correct errors in them. A certain brother in law of mine, who must remain nameless because he is bigger than me, spelled the family surname incorrectly in the heading. Then he put my birthday down incorrectly, and so on August 22 four people emailed me to wish me happy birthday even though it was not my birthday. And I cannot find out how to make those corrections. That is on the *MyHeritage* site. On the *Geni.com* site we got very excited putting names down so that now of 51 names on the site, 6 are my name repeated, 6 are each of my brothers, and 6 are my sister. There is a note in the Help page which says you can delete names but you cannot delete names of people who have joined!

The problems of technology for us over 40!

### Kahunah

Words fascinate me. Whenever I hear a "different" word I try very hard to find out more about it. In *shul* recently there was use of the word "*kahuna*" in that Moses wants to know from Korach if the Levites also want to be the priests (do they want to be the *Kahuna*; "*kahuna*" being a form of *Kohen*, a priest). I had heard the word *kahuna* in some other sense so I checked my dictionaries and found that the Hawaiians call their leader the *Kahuna*. Is this just coincidental or are the Hawaiians one of the lost tribes? A joke!!

Then I heard the word palooka. No. No direct Hebrew origin but the man who invented the word was Al Capp, cartoonist who was most famous for writing and drawing *Lil Abner*. The predecessors of Lil Abner were the Palookas who were hillbillies who had come to town. Al Capp was Alfred Gerald Caplin. Jewish?

### Ancestry 24

For quite a considerable time I have been getting an email through MWeb which connects me to *Ancestry24*, a site for South African genealogists. This week I had the pleasure of meeting the founder and manager, Heather McAllister. She told me that she started off *Ancestry24* as a hobby and then Naspers, which owns MWeb, made her an offer to buy the site and to employ her to run it. Isn't that an absolute pleasure? To be paid to do the work you love, and to have money in the bank?

I recommend this site to you if only for browsing and to see the wide range of interests catered for, especially South African history.

### Muizenberg Cemetery

There has been quite a bit of discussion in the Press and on the Net about the vandalism at the Muizenberg Cemetery. Some months ago I was contracted to take some photographs there and I was warned that I should not go unless I take an armed guard with me. I drove out there and found the Council's uniformed security guard, and asked him if he would accompany me. He agreed and said, "Look over at that little hill there. You see those two men ... they're moving now... if I was not with you they would have attacked you." I had no reason not to believe him.

I was totally unprepared for the sight of the *Ohel*, or what had been the *Ohel*, in the Jewish Cemetery. It started with vandals stealing wiring and the basins. Then the vandals broke into the *Ohel* and stole all the fittings, then the wiring and the piping, and then the windows, and eventually, they broke the walls and stole the bricks out of the wall and the roof. There was just a floor which was battered and broken. I felt so sad for the sanctity of a building that had seen hundreds of funerals.

### Cape Town Holocaust Centre

In true Jewish tradition, the CTHC does not ruminate on the past horrors but it goes out to try to prevent future recurrences of a similar kind, and future ignorance. Their newsletter which you can request by sending a message to [admin@ctholocaust.co.za](mailto:admin@ctholocaust.co.za), shows how they are arranging development programmes, panel discussions, and exhibitions. They really are an

outgoing organization and I recommend that it would be worth your while to see the newsletters.

### More on Surnames

A good web site: *The Names of the Jews: A preliminary FAQ*, by Joachim Mugdan, contains interesting questions and some answers. See:

[www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/namfaq0.htm](http://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/namfaq0.htm)

A good book: *A Dictionary of Surnames* by Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges (published by Oxford).

When I bought the book it was priced at sixty Pounds which at that time was R480. I was in England and I went into Oxford's retail shop in London. I asked if they had a copy and the man showed me a slightly dirtied copy which had been their demonstration copy. He said I could have it for twenty Pounds! Wow, I kissed him! (Not really but I was very pleased.)

### New Facebook group: *Die Jode van Suid Afrika*

As mentioned in the last issue, there is a very interesting new Facebook group that has been created by Jeff Nathan for Jews with links to South Africa. It is called *Die Jode van Suid Afrika* and can be found at:

[www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=113371514921](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=113371514921)

As of this writing, the group has 601 members.

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## ANN'S CORNER

*Editor's Note: A few more interesting items from Ann Rabinowitz (annrab@bellsouth.net).*

I happened upon a ship's manifest for the *Virginia City Victory*, departing Cape Town, April 30, 1948, and arriving in Baltimore, MD, May 19, 1948.

There were three Hebrew passengers:

COHEN, Jacob, age 66, born Shkud, Lithuania, living in Johannesburg.

COHEN, Gitel Margolis, age 54, born Telshi, Lithuania, living in Johannesburg, South Africa.

BARNETT, Deborah Daisy, age 54, born Johannesburg, South Africa, living in Cape Town.

The speedy 15-knot ship they sailed on was one of the 534 American Victory Ships built by the U.S. Maritime Commission during World War II.

Thought this might be of interest.

◆◆◆

With the capability of Google Books, researchers can now look up early books on South Africa. One such that I ran across recently was the following:

*On Veldt and Farm in Bechuanaland, Cape Colony, the Transvaal, and Natal*, by Frances Macnab, 1897. (The author's real name was Agnes Fraser.)

[http://books.google.com/books?id=pRcUAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_navlinks\\_s#v=onepage&q=&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=pRcUAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_navlinks_s#v=onepage&q=&f=false)

Agnes Fraser (1859 – 1944) is one of the many women who wrote about Africa at that time and who provide detailed and fascinating accounts of life there.

She produced several other travelogues to places such as Morocco, British Columbia, etc., all of which were written under her pseudonym of Frances Macnab.

There is a search engine for the book which is to the left side of the page.

If one searches for "Jew", one will find several references which are of interest and which express the British view of things. Just click on each one and it will bring you to the page(s) where the information appears.

In particular, the general description of the life of a peddler, trader and money-lender is quite illustrative of those who came to South Africa and started their commercial careers in this manner.

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## GRAVESTONES

*Stan Hart*

*Taken from correspondence between Stan and Beryl Baleson.*

Beryl, you have my permission to use my name as the contact for any information about any city or town in South Africa, except for Cape Town and

environs (which is Colin Plen's domain) and Johannesburg (where the *Chevra Kadisha* there can be contacted).

It is pointless putting the Durban *Chevra Kadisha's* contact details, as I am the immediate Past Chairman, and any correspondence they receive on such matters would be forwarded to me anyway.

I have already put together a comprehensive listing of *all* the country district cemeteries, and am currently busy photographing every cemetery that I can get to in my spare time. I have all the graves in the Kwa-Zulu region, as well as some from other areas such as Brakpan and so on photographed already.

Obviously this is a massive project, but I have had some assistance from various quarters, and hope that I will be able to complete this within the next couple of years.

The problem with Johannesburg is that they have photographed all of West Park, but used a system which is not user-friendly nor are the photos in a JPG format and so are difficult to handle.

Bloemfontein and Pretoria are under discussion with my assistants right now, and of course Colin is very involved in Cape Town, but those photos I believe will not be available to the public domain soon.

Ultimately, my intention is to be able (as Saul Issroff and I have discussed) to make my data available to a JewishGen-based website, as a resource for all researchers to be able to access. If Johannesburg and Cape Town are unwilling to join this project, then so be it.

Any further information you need, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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## REVISITING MUIZENBERG



### Muizenberg Exhibition Newsletter

Work on the Muizenberg Exhibition is in full swing. We have collected an enormous amount of material, over 1000 photographs and many wonderful memories and anecdotes, all of which are now with our layout designer who will be selecting the most appropriate and useful for the exhibition.

The Exhibition will open in Cape Town on 16 December 2009 at the Jewish Museum and will be held in Johannesburg at the RCHCC later in 2010.

A great deal of excitement and enthusiasm has been generated by this exhibition which will be accompanied by a number of ancillary events. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed valuable information, without which the exhibition would not have been possible, and we are looking forward to seeing all of you at the exhibition once it has opened.

With best wishes,

The Muizenberg Team

Email: [memoriesofmuiz@gmail.com](mailto:memoriesofmuiz@gmail.com)

Phone: (011) 728-8378 Fax: (018) 468-5895

Postal address: P. O. Box 117, Klerksdorp 2570  
South Africa

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### Ochberg Orphans publications

The *Ochberg Orphans - July 2009* booklet is my work in progress towards compiling a book on the Ochberg Orphans, and I ask you to let me know of any errors and invite additional information. I plan to “publish” a similar booklet every 6 months and PG to publish the book proper at the end of 2010 as a sequel to the Arc Memory books. I also appeal to all the descendents of Ochberg Orphans to please make contact with me and to share the stories of your parents, and if you are aware of other descendents of the Orphans, please can you put me in touch with them as well.

David Sandler  
[sedsand@ca.com.au](mailto:sedsand@ca.com.au)

Anyone who might want more information about the book please refer to the Arcadia – South African Jewish Orphanage web site at:

<http://www.arcadia.ca.com.au/page4.htm>

or contact David Sandler directly by e-mail.

### SURNAMES APPEARING IN THIS NEWSLETTER

#### Vol. 10, Issue 1 – September 2009

The numbers in brackets refer to the page numbers where the surname appears:

Baleson (2, 13), Barnett (13), Beider (8), Blecher (2), Bloom (2), Browse (6), Caplin (12), Capp (12), Cohen (2, 4, 13), Epstein (2), Feitelberg (3, 5 – 7), Foer (11), Fraser (13), Friedman (6), Gamsu (8), Getz (2, 5, 15), Goldberg (2, 4), Goldman (8), Gordon (8), Hanks (13), Harris (2), Hart (2, 13), Herzberg (3, 9), Hillman (5), Hodges (13), Humphreys (10), Issroff (2 – 5), Kaplan (4), Kaplan (6), Katz (2), Konigfest (6), Kulman (5), Lapid/Lapidus/Lapidoth (8), Lerer (4), Lipschitz (8), Lurie (8), Macnab (13), Marks (8), McAllister (12), Mugdan (13), Nathan (13), Ochberg (15), Ogus (2, 4, 5), Ozer (2), Perchov (11), Plen (2, 3, 5, 11, 12), Rabinowitz (4, 13), Safran (11), Salomon (9), Sandler (15), Segall (5, 8), Shaldova (3), Shapiro (2), Spitz (2), Springer (6), Van der Horst (8), Yalovetsky (8), Zapiro (2), Ziman (5)

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