

A FAMILY CHRONICLE

BY

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## F O R E W O R D

Family history complete with anecdotes, stories and general information never fails to fascinate both young and old alike. Nowadays, when it is so easy to tape oral history reports rather than write them, it is rare, if unusual, to be asked to do just this. I am all for it. For me the written word, old photographs, maps, passports, newspaper cuttings, the bric-a-brac of living, things one can see and touch are infinitely more meaningful, enriching and intimate. They allow margins for conjecture and imagination and conjure up a host of magical memories.

This is what happened when Michael Bear, a cousin, once removed, and a young man of quite considerable vision heard some of the family history. He wanted it set down on paper so that nothing would be lost in the limbo of passing time and failing memories. He initiated this project and has supported it both materially and spiritually.

Here then is the family chronicle as I recall it; stored up in my memory and preserved to a purpose beyond life itself - more resounding than brass and more enduring than porphyry.

Clare Wollach  
Tel Aviv, Israel, 1992

## THE COHEN SIDE

Gittel Chai Cohen, my maternal grandmother and grandmother and great-grandmother also to many mentioned in this account would have celebrated her 130th birthday in January, 1992.

She was born Gittel Gordon in Augustow in the province of Suwalki in Poland, hard by the then East Prussian border town of Konigsberg, now Kaliningrad, often referred to as Russia-Poland since it was constantly changing hands, on the third of January, 1862. Augustow is clearly marked on any map of north-central Europe and remains, according to reports from "Landsleit" (countrymen) who have visited there, much the same, but like all towns and villages of the once teeming Polish pales of settlement, bereft of Jews.

The name Gittel is a Yiddish corruption of the German name, "Gutte", meaning "good". The second name, "Chai", Hebrew for "alive" or "living", was added during a severe illness from which she was not expected to recover. This is in accordance with Jewish custom. Names pertaining to life or longevity were given during the reading of the Torah accompanied by special prayers for those in extremis. She used this name all her life.

The Scottish name of Gordon, so legend has it, was actually brought to Poland by a group of clan Gordon traders who remained there and later intermarried with local Jews and Poles.

Although she was short, a mere five foot and two inches, with dark brown eyes and hair, Gittel is often recollected as tall and impressive. This was probably due to her imperious manner and erect carriage coupled with an almost preternatural

Intelligence and intellectuality rare in Jewish women of her time. But most of all she was a trader; a mercantile genius with a canny instinct for buying and selling at the right times and for always knowing just the right merchandise to purchase. Later, business people and commercial establishments in South Africa sought her advice before venturing to conclude any deals or undertake any transactions.

Gittel started out very young in the world of commerce. In Augustow, aged 18, she ran the family business which dealt mainly in the coloured threads, yarns and textiles so beloved of both Polish and Russian peasantry. Her mother was a bed-ridden invalid; there were smaller children to be attended to and her father, like most religious Jewish men of the time, spent most of his time in study. Very early in her life, therefore, she assumed the role of the typical Jewish woman of the time - the loving provider, the child-minder and all the myriad assignments of daily living. However, while accepting the behavioural norms of the times she did so under protest. Her mind was on business and she travelled back and forth over the border into Germany scouring the major Polish cities of Grodno, Bialystok and Lodz for merchandise. A young woman travelling alone in those days was considered to be totally eccentric if not plain mad, but she cared little or nothing for other people's opinions.

When I was very small she told me exactly how dangerous such trips could be. If one hired a "droshky" to take one across the border and the driver did not alight to cross himself before each and every icon at the roadside there could be no doubt that he was either a thief or a cut-throat. Gittel, it seems knew how to choose the right droshky drivers since she survived to tell the tale. To the end of her days she did not



Map showing Augustów in Suwałki and the major cities of Poland. Also Lithuania and a section of Belorussia. Gibbel Chai Cohen did business in each of these places.

suffer fools gladly, hated gossip and chit-chat and held her own strong views on most subjects. As far as I can recall she did exactly as she pleased, neither explaining nor complaining. A wonderful story which I heard as a child is woven around Gittel's firm belief that the famous French actress, Sarah Bernhardt, the Divine Sarah, was none other than her sister, Sara, Sorele, who disappeared when the entire family, pushing their invalid mother's bed were escaping from a huge fire which threatened to engulf the town of Augustow. Gittel claimed that Sorele must have lost her way and was found and taken in by Catholic nuns who had converted her. She was convinced that her "sister" had remained Jewish in her heart - especially since she sided with the Dreyfusards during the notorious trial and was, despite opposition from most of her contemporaries, openly on the side of the unfortunate Jewish lieutenant. The flaming red hair, the aquiline nose, her eccentric temperament and and writhlike thinness served to convince Gittel more and more that Sarah Bernhardt was truly her little sister. That was how she was, difficult, always acting out and dramatizing situations of all kinds, barely eating anything and always fiery. There could be no mistake. My own investigation of this claim together with the reading of numerous biographies and writings on the subject of this almost mythical personality proved that the accounts of her birth and ancestry and the dates given did not tally with Gittel's account. But then Sarah was known to be a notorious liar and prevaricatrix. On stage and off she was constantly acting and fantasizing and would, according to her biographers, do anything to create a scene to avoid or perplex the press who liked, inter alia, to harp on the subject of her painful thinness and Hebraic profile. "You know, she's such a liar," remarked Alexandre Dumas the younger, "she may even be fat."

One day she would be found kneeling before a golden madonna in some church and the next would find her weeping bitterly in a synágoque. No-one would ever really know the truth, but Gittel remained adamant even suggesting that her oldest son go to Paris to see what he could find out. Her son had better things to do and now we shall never know for sure. Still it's a great story and reveals, for a moment, the romantic side of Gittel's outwardly tough personality. It was during this escape that Gittel and her family found refuge in the forests of Augustow in a tavern owned by one Avraham Dov (Ber in Yiddish) Cohen, father of Chaim Yitzchak Cohen (Hyman Isaac Cohen). He was so impressed by her bravery and resourcefulness as well as her appearance that he encouraged his son to marry her. And marry they did.

Chaim Yitzchak, grandfather and greatgrandfather to many mentioned in this account, was born in Augustow in October 1858. He too was short, about five foot four inches with brilliant blue-green eyes and fair skin and, as I recall, a beautifully barbered imperial and moustache. He had an aquiline nose and a finely molded, almost proconsular head - features inherited by quite a few of his male descendants.

This marriage, as we shall see later, did not turn out to be a "marriage of true minds". Both were gifted, temperamental, go-getting people with strong characters; stubborn in their beliefs and serious about their directions in life so that they found it difficult to work together. Gittel had her own business and Chaim Yitzchak his own and like this, separately, they came together on the family front. Socially, they were models of stability and unity as they walked, arm-in-arm, like royalty to the synágoque on Sabbath and High Holy Days, dressed in all their finery.



Gittel Chai Cohen  
1862 - 1943  
As a young woman.

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**G. COHEN,**

**Draper, Outfitter and Job Buyer.**



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Men's Suits, Perfect Fitting, always in Stock.

OPEN on SATURDAYS from 7 a.m. WHOLESALE & RETAIL

Gittel Cohens first business card



First year in Israel then  
Palestine - the religious life.



With proposed wife for her  
son Jack.

This marriage produced four sons and one daughter and one set of twins who, my mother told me, were accidentally smothered in the vast featherbeds in which they were put to sleep - a common occurrence in those days.

The following are the names, both Hebrew and English of Gittel and Haim Yitzchak Cohen's children. All born in Augustow:

HEBREW			
NACHUM	-	NAHUM	}
			}
			}
AZRIEL	-	ISIDORE	}
YAAKOV ARIEH	-	JACK LIONEL	}
FREIDA MALKA	-	EMILY	}
YOSEF SHIMSHON	-	JOSEPH SAMSON	}

COHEN

GITTEL GORDON M HAIM YITZCHAK COHEN

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NAHUM	ISIDORE	JACK LIONEL	EMILY	JOSEPH SAMSON



Sarah Bernhardt: A caricature which appeared during an American tour.

## SOUTH AFRICA

By the time their oldest son Nahum had completed gymnasium(High School) Chaim Yitzchak had travelled abroad several times. Things were getting difficult in Poland and he was looking for a suitable country to which to emigrate. His visits to Scranton and Wilkes-Barre in Pennsylvania and to Pittsburgh in the United States to which two of his brothers, Samuel and Moshe and his sister Masha had emigrated in search of the "goldene medina" - "the golden land" - had proved fruitless. Gittel could never have managed there. She hated domestic chores of any kind and had always employed others to cook, clean and care for the children while she ran her business. Such help was, as yet, unavailable in the U.S and odd as it might sound, was a major deciding factor in Chaim Yitzchak's calculations when seeking out the possibilities for easier living in South Africa. One must bear in mind that travel in those times took weeks, even months, and once the decision to emigrate was made the settling in process often took years. Families were separated for long periods and were finally brought over when the husbands had succeeded in finding reasonable accommodations and means of livelihood.

Sometime (the exact date is unknown to me) before the turn of the century Chaim Yitzchak, accompanied by his sons Nahum and Isidore, journeyed to Cape Town in South Africa, leaving Gittel in Augustow with the younger children, Jack, Emily and Joseph.

Soon, as times worsened in Poland, whole families began to emigrate. South Africa beckoned and people, having heard from relatives that the prospects there were excellent following upon the discovery of gold and diamonds; that the climate was good and that a small but well-knit community already existed

there, decided to leave pogrom-ridden Poland with its hardships and sub-zero winters. Gittel's neighbours in Augustow, the Winitzki family (later Winnett in South Africa) were about to depart so Gittel sent her third son Jack Lionel in the care of her friend Rachel Winitzki to join his father and brothers in Cape Town. Then Gittel made her own decision. She would leave Augustow and travel to South Africa to join her family but would stop in Manchester where her brother Monash Gordon had settled in Cheetham Hill some years before. He ran a flourishing salad oil business as well as Kosher Lepessach products - a firm which operates in Manchester to the present day under different ownership. Since it would take Chaim Yitzchak the better part of two years to bring her and the children over she preferred to be in Manchester with her close family rather than wait it out in Augustow where living had become dangerous and business bad.

Gittel, with her two younger children, Emily and the infant Joseph, remained in Manchester for two years and arrived in Cape Town in 1902 during the Boer War. Emily and Joe could already prattle away in English and Gittel had also picked up some useful phrases. To the end of their days both Emily (my mother) and Joseph (my uncle) spoke English with slightly Lancashire accents mixed with an American twang which they adopted from their father who heard English for the first time in Pennsylvania. They would pronounce "dance", "advance" and "glance" like Americans with an "a" sound as in "ants", "caps", etc but "bound", "round" and "found" came out pure Mancunian ("bahnd", "rahnd" and "fahnd").

Immigrants to South Africa in those days had, the moment they stepped ashore, to find some immediate means of livelihood. For the most part they became pedlars or, in Afrikaans, "smouse". The "smous" was a familiar sight in Cape Town. He



1858

1933

Chaim Yitzchak Cohen (Hyman Isaac)  
As a young man looking for a new  
land. Photographed in Wilkes Barre, Pa.  
while on a visit to his family there.

brought Dutch medicines, German prints (printed materials), needles and thread and basic household necessities to the housewives' doors. For the first two years after his arrival Chaim Yitzchak plied the route between Cape Town and Simonstown, a British naval base in False Bay. And what an elegant pedlar he must have been!

Chaim Yitzchak was very energetic and enterprising. He could do anything and everything with his golden hands. Never in his entire life did he allow anyone, however highly qualified, to touch or repair his machines or to fix anything in his home or in Gittel's shop. He did it all himself.

He was an absolute perfectionist, spotlessly clean and obsessional about the tiniest detail, trusting nobody when it came to matters of money or work. He had to check and double-check everything, was punctual to a fault and ran what the English call "a tight ship". Woe betide anyone who was sloppy or produced imperfect work, lied, malingered or found excuses. His temper was like Etna in eruption - volcanic and totally uncontrolled. In another time and under other conditions of life he would most certainly have become a famous engineer, architect or inventor. I can remember him with his leather tool satchel in his hand. He was never without it.

When Gittel landed in Cape Town she found, to her surprise and pleasure, that Chaim Yitzchak had set up a very respectable printing establishment called "Castle Printing Works" in a street called Sir Lowry Road, very near the famous pentagonal fortress built by the Dutch East India company over two centuries before in 1666.

Legend has it that although he knew nothing about printing he set up his first compositing machine setting the type with



Chaim Yitzchak Cohen in middle-age in  
Cape Town, South Africa.

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match-sticks and undertook to print the fliers for a performance of the travelling Yiddish Theatre at the Winter Garden, one of the first theatres in the Cape. How he did this eludes me, but given the fact that he was so inventive and ingenious I can well believe it.

It was in the vicinity of the Castle, as it was called, that most of the Jewish immigrant families settled in spacious double-storied Victorian houses complete with decorative "fer forgé" ironwork balconies. Chaim Yitzchak had purchased just such a house at 22 Hanover Street facing the side of the Castle named "Oranje" in honour of the Dutch House of Orange. (Each of the five points were named: Oranje, Buren, Katzenellebogen, Leerdam and Nassau). This area, later known by its municipal division title of "District Six" deteriorated into a notorious slum. The early populations consisting of Jews, Cape coloureds, Malays and some urban blacks, really cared for it and looked after the picturesque shops and park areas. Over the years it became the haunt of drug addicts, dagga (hempweed like hashish/cannabis) dealers, drunks, illegal liquor shebeens and prostitution. Jews still maintained business there but it was a very rough place indeed.

From 1948 onwards, under apartheid, the remaining coloured population was systematically moved to outlying suburbs and given alternative accommodation and District Six was finally razed to the ground in the 60's. Of the few buildings which were allowed to remain was Oranje House, a new building erected by Emily (my mother) on the exact site where Gittel had opened her second shop on arrival in Cape Town.

District Six as I remember it was one of the most colourful places in the Cape. For the first eight years of my life I

lived there and later, as a schoolgirl, student and working girl, went back and forth to help my parents in the shop or to bring things to my mother who worked all day and who was seldom home. One of the highlights of District Six was the Coon Carnival, a competitive fiesta of music and dancing and original costumes. My mother provided the materials for all the costumes of the vying teams and was sworn to secrecy lest she disclose the colours or themes chosen. I can never hear the sound of twanging banjos, ukeleles and guitars accompanying springing feet and gyrating bodies without a great deal of nostalgia. The sound of the very original tunes and words sung by the choirs of natural voices as the performers high-stepped it down Hanover Street on Old New Year's Eve (Ou Nuwe Jaar) as they called it, on their way to Green Point Common, remains with me to this day.

The streets of District Six had pure English names and later, when it deteriorated, these names seemed terribly incongruous. Exeter Square, Lavender Hill, Searle Street, Hanover Street, Russell Square, Tennant Street and a host of others could not hide the poverty and misery which existed there. For some reason the City Council of the Cape overlooked this area and did nothing to maintain it.

The moment Gittel laid eyes on this house she decided that they would live in the top storey and she would open a drapery shop on the ground floor. Within a short while she got the hang of things and little by little sought out the merchants, introduced herself to all the commercial houses who could supply her with goods. Later she imported her own merchandise from Italy, Japan and Britain. I can clearly remember myself sitting on a bale of Jap silks which had just been delivered from the docks with "Jardine Bros. Shippers. Yokohama, Japan" printed on the hessian coverings.

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Very quickly Gittel picked up enough English, Afrikaans and smatterings of Xhosa and Zulu mixed with Yiddish to attract all manner of customers. She became an expert on the subject of tribal blankets, shawls, dress materials and headgear. She catered to the black people who came from far off once or twice a year. Gittel knew what the coloured people and Malays liked best and knew exactly how and where to find the items. August to December found her busy with Xmas preparing stock for months ahead and introducing a system of lay-bys which would be paid of by Xmas. Each available child had to help during the Xmas rush. This became a family tradition for years to come. Boys and girls alike were mobilised into strimming stacks of panama hats with ribbon rosettes, artificial flowers and an odd feather or two.

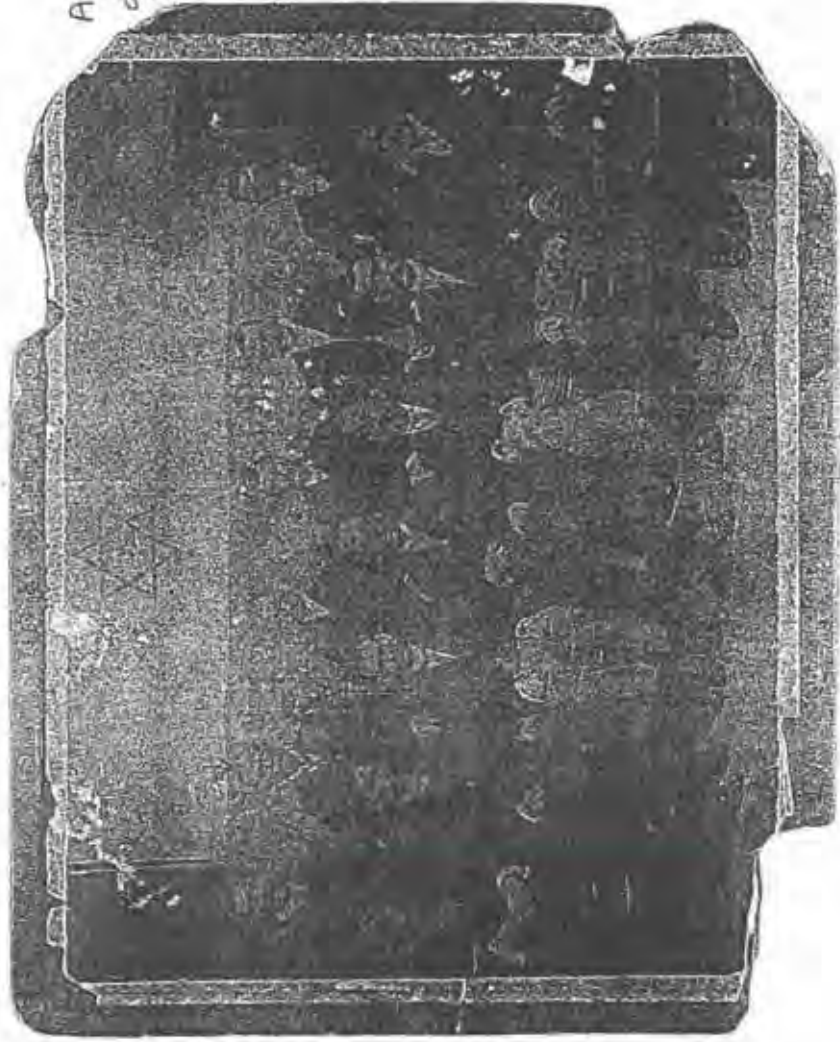
As the business flourished and the children grew up Gittel moved into larger premises at 10 Hanover Street, the original site where Oranje House still stands today. The family also moved into their new home above this shop. There were four floors, two of which were occupied by the family and the others let to other families, amongst them the Stockbridges, whose daughter, Tosca taught music at St. Mary's Convent and who taught me my first scales. They were devout Catholics and coloured. No apartheid then! The governor of Robben Island, the infamous penal settlement, leper colony and later prison for political prisoners such as Nelson Mandela and others, also lived in one of the apartments. One day Gittel's curiosity got the better of her and she asked him to show her the island. The governor ferried her across the Cape rollers. She was sea-sick for days, disgusted by what she had seen. Chaim Yitzchak's business flourished equally well and in February, 1903, he became a fully naturalised South African citizen. His two older sons, Nahum and Isidore, worked with him while the others were at school. Later Nahum started his

own business as a mercantile broker while Isidore remained in the business for the rest of his life. His brother Jack joined him for a while but they disagreed and went their separate ways.

When we were children it became a tradition for us to help staple the programmes which were printed by Castle Printing Works and, on the evening of performances at the City Hall, distribute them among the patrons. In this way my cousins and I, from earliest childhood, attended every possible performance of music, opera, ballet and recitals by locals as well as world-famous artists, free of charge. Who could forget Beniamino Gigli, Benno Mosseiwitsch, Vladimir Horowitz, Amelita Galli-Curci, Rosita Silvestri and the Carl Rosa Opera Company, Vera Nemchinova and Boris Dubokhoff of the disbanded Ballet Russe to name but a few.

Chaim Yitzchak was very active in communal affairs. He was the first Gabbai (deacon) of the orthodox synagogue in Constitution Street (also in District Six) called Beit Hamidrash Mechodosh. As far as he was concerned it was an authentic replica of any real synagogue in Europe and not a copy of a Gothic Cathedral like the Gardens synagogue whose rabbis were trained at the Hebrew Union College and wore clerical collars like the Christians. Gittel and Chaim Yitzchak as well as my father referred to it as "die Englische Shul" - the "English Synagogue" and would rather conduct services in their homes than put a foot into that building. Later, however, my uncles and all the children found it quite a pleasant place to be if one was obliged to go to the synagogue regularly. The immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe who lived in Hanover Street, Parkin Street, Caledon Street and Mount Street - later District Six - preferred the orthodox shul because it was familiar to them

A very old photograph  
of the committee of  
Dorshai Zion. (Seeker  
of Zion). Arrow points  
to H.I. Cohen (Chaim  
Yitzchak)



and they could identify with the ambience and the customs down to the last details such as, for example, putting little mounds of snuff on the arm of each seat to refresh the worshippers or the little snacks of sponge cake, brandy or herring after the service.

As children we used to sit with my grandfather whose entire body was wrapped in his fringed talit and we shuddered when, as a "Cohen (or priest), he fell to the ground during special prayers or blessed the congregation from in front of the Holy Ark. If we looked, we were told, we would go blind!

Chaim Yitzchak was also one of the first Zionists in Cape Town. He was a member of Dorshel Zion (Seekers of Zion), a group in which most respected Jews, leaders of the community were involved. It was more in the nature of a social obligation since he had no intention of ever settling in Eretz Yisrael but collected money so that others could be settled there.

Nobody could or dared to beat Chaim Yitzchak at chess. His sons and cronies played with him but the fun was usually spoiled by his violent temper and his intolerance towards poor moves or mistakes or taking too long to decide. In a flash he would upset the entire table and send the ivory chess pieces scattering all over the floor. When I was very small it was my job to sit under the table and collect the chessmen and return them to their box. As the years passed and the community grew Gittel and Chaim Yitzchak Cohen made many friends. The focal point of Jewish social life at the time was the synagogue so that people knew each other, if not intimately, then by sight.



Chaim Yitzchak Cohen in old age

A couple with whom they were on quite friendly terms with was Moshe and Chaya Menia (Chienna) Kaplan, immigrants from Lithuania, whose two children, Jenny (Sheine) and Sam (Simcha) were friendly with their children.

Moshe Kaplan looked like King George V and his wife, always called Chienna, was a tiny but energetic woman whose turquoise earrings fascinated me as a child. She was born in Sidluwa in Lithuania, a tiny village not often marked on maps. My father used to say "Sidluwa is as big as a yawn". They, rather she, ran a small grocery and sweet shop while he spent his time, in true Eastern European fashion, in the synagogue. Because of this both their children became almost agnostic, observing little or nothing of Jewish tradition and customs. The memory of that tiny woman working so hard so meekly, patiently and uncomplainingly, without any support from her husband set them against synagogues and religion forever.

Chienna's halfbrother, Jacob Friedland, who came to South Africa long before they did was a wellknown ostrich feather and curio dealer who was also very rich and very snobbish. One day his and Chienna's nephew, the son of their brother Meier Yonah who still remained in Sidluwa, Zalman Zvi (Hirsch in Yiddish) arrived in Cape Town having escaped army service. Like so many before him, in the Russian Army. He knew Chienna well from home and had come to stay with her, sharing a bed with his cousin Sam and being taught basic English by his cousin Jenny who was then training to be a teacher. Zalman was a typical "Yeshiva Bocher", a pupil of the world-famous Rabbi Israel Meier Ka-Cohen - the "Chafetz Chaim" of Radin in Lithuania. He was known by this name because of a book he had written with that title. Roughly translated it means "Desire of Life" - "Whoever desires life



מי האיש החפץ חיים, אוהב ימים לראות טוב, לצוה לשונך מרע  
 ושפתוך מדבה מרמה סור מרע ועשה טוב בקש שלום ורדפהו (תהלים לד)

What man is he that desireth life and loveth many  
 days. that he may see good?  
 Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking  
 guile.

Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and  
 pursue it.

Psalms xxxiv: 12.

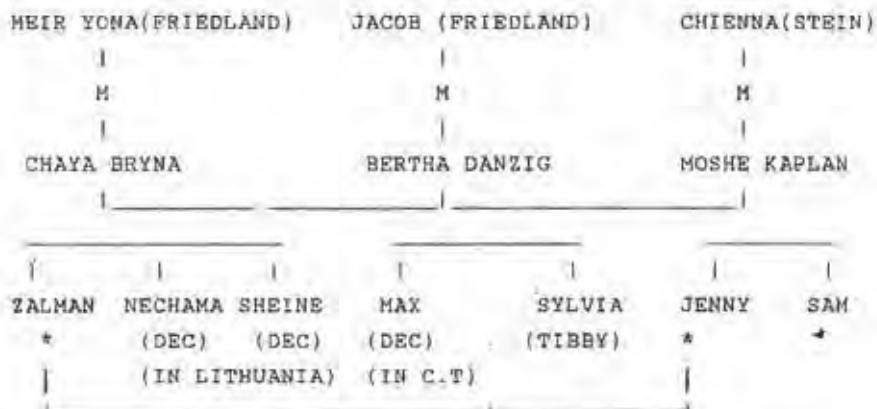
Rabbi Israel Meier Hacohen of Radin Lithuania →  
 who lived by this philosophy and taught it as a  
 way of life. He is known universally as the "Hafetz  
 Chaim" - "the desirer of life."

must guard his lips from speaking evil or from slandering anyone and must pursue peace". My father, Zalman, stuck to this philosophy all his life.

Chienna, in fact, was his step-aunt and Jacob Friedland his full uncle because his paternal grandmother, Dina, had been married three times and had produced two sons by one husband called Friedland and one daughter, Chienna, by her second husband, Stein. This mattered not one bit. Zalman adored his aunt Chienna and she him. Then his uncle, Jacob Friedland, stepped in and sent his nephew off to the Calvinia District, four days by horse and cart, from Cape Town, to work in the concession store and ostrich farm of a friend of his there. Zalman went under protest and this changed his entire life. Though he remained traditional and religious his high intellect was not fully exploited and his pure spirit was seriously damaged as he limped along reluctantly in business giving most of his time to communal affairs in the Jewish Community. Thanks to him we were taught the Hebrew language and Jewish culture which stands me, especially, in good stead each and every day.

DINA .m. FRIEDLAND  
 STEIN  
 KAMINETZ

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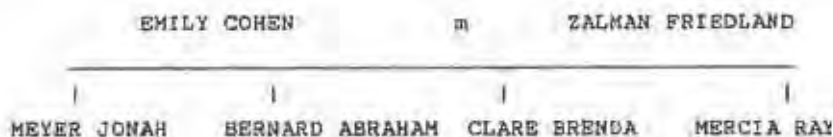
\*Showing Zalman's relationship to Jenny and Sam Kaplan - step-cousins.

By this time Emily, now a beautiful woman of 27 (old by the norms of the times) and unmarried, ran the business with her mother Gittel, kept house for her and was not allowed to work for anyone else even though she had gone to secretarial school and was very efficient.

In 1919 Zalman, now a small businessman, came back to Cape Town. He was strong, handsome and learned and could now speak Afrikaans and a heavily accented English of sorts. The two families, Cohen and Kaplan decided, after watching him closely in Shul, that he would make a fine husband for Emily. Nobody asked Emily what she wanted but she neither protested nor disobeyed. Zalman had always admired her and he was quite happy to have won so lovely and capable a wife.

They were married on June 1st, 1920. As a wedding gift to her daughter Gittel handed over her fully stocked drapery business taking it for granted that Emily would follow in her footsteps while she retired to spend six months of each year in her summer chalet in Muizenberg and busying herself with synagogue and communal affairs. The merchants and commercial firms, however, would not let her be and came at all times to get her advice. So willy-nilly she was drawn back into business life and continued to do so on a consultancy basis, until she made up her mind to go to settle in Palestine in 1933.

Zalman and Emily Friedland had four children:



GITTEL GORDON M CHAIM YITZCHAR COHEN

NAHUM	ISIDORE	JACK LIONEL	EMILY	JOSEPH
M	M	M	M	(UNMARRIED)
REBECCA HOTZ	YETTA SMULOWITZ	EVA WOOLF(D)	ZALMAN FRIEDLAND	(NO ISSUE)
MATHIAS	ZELDA	NEVILLE IVOR	MEYER JONAH	
JOYCE	RIVA		BERNARD ABRAHAM	
MIRIAM	RITA		CLARE BRENDA	
	PHYLLIS		MERCIA BAY	

THESE ARE THE CHILDREN AND 12 GRANDCHILDREN OF GITTEL AND CHAIM YITZCHAR COHEN

## THE JOURNEY TO PALESTINE

In 1931, soon after Chaim Yitzchak's death from cancer Gittel sold her town house at 109 Roland Street in the residential area that had grown up outside of District Six as well as her wooden, summer chalet in Killarney Road, Muizenberg. She also sold the contents of both houses. There were wonderful pieces of furniture, art-deco and art nouveau - just the thing today; a round red gramophone with painted golden dragons, drapes and coverings, clocks and ornaments. Some pieces, however, were given to my mother. All Chaim Yitzchak's books (including a leather bound set of the Talmud) were donated to the synagogue library as well as her own, for she too was an avid reader and especially liked the Zohar which dealt with Jewish mysticism. She read German, Polish, Russian, Yiddish and English quite easily.

All the contents of the summer house mainly shells she had gathered along the beaches, interesting bits of driftwood and seaweed and some rustic pieces of furniture were given away to people she liked. I suppose she must have kept a few things for herself as mementos, but as I recall, when she came to stay with us prior to her leaving for Palestine, all her possessions were crammed into an enormous travelling trunk - a great chest - which, when empty served as a marvellous hiding place for children.

Our family now occupied a new house in the Gardens area in Clive Street off Upper Mill Street - a pleasant place near a pine forest within walking distance of the family business in Hanover Street. My parents bought it when my sister Mercia was born and we had already been living there for several years. In the interim Chaim Yitzchak had died of cancer and Jack Lionel who had married Eva Woolf of whom both his

parents had disapproved, was now divorced. Gittel's oldest son Nahum was married to Rebecca Hotz, the auburn haired daughter of well known ostrich feather merchants of Duddshoorn. Isidore too had married Yetta Smulovitz who had immigrated from the town of Nevel in Poland and settled in King William's Town in the Transkei where her brothers ran concession stores in Tsolo and Umtata. Joseph was away studying medicine in Glasgow, Scotland much against Gittel's will. She begged and pleaded with him to give it up and to go into business and almost succeeded in sabotaging his studies by travelling to Scotland in 1923 to bring him back home. The tone of his letters had disturbed her. She felt he was working too hard and not living well. Her argument was that a doctor's life was one big rush with little to show for it. Although she did manage to bring him back for a year and he did make money selling medical instruments for Owen and Jones (still in existence today), the moment he had enough funds he returned to continue his studies. Unfortunately he became seriously depressed and was unable to practise as a doctor. He was returned to Cape Town where he lived until his death in 1958. Gittel supported him through all those year by sending funds for his upkeep from Palestine.

Joseph Samson, Uncle Joe, was famous for having won medals for swimming the River Clyde in Scotland. He was exceptionally good looking and strong; a lover of beautiful clothes and the high life coupled with an almost obsessional stubbornness and neatness. He too would allow no-one to attend him even when he was seriously ill. This brought about his early demise from gangrene caused by badly treated diabetes.

Gittel was sixty nine when she decided to emigrate to Palestine. This was a vast age in those days when the life

expectancy rate was far lower than it is today. If anyone decided to go to Palestine it meant that he was preparing himself to die there - a singular honour then and now. I know that this was in Gittel's mind because she had, packed in her great trunk, some bolts of really perfect linen for her shroud. The worst thing as far as she was concerned was to be buried in a shroud provided by strangers. Like everything else in her life it had to be her very own. She was totally independent financially and physically and could not bear to be assisted in any way. Gittel felt that her work was done. Her children were off her hands, she now had twelve grandchildren and had reached her seventieth year in reasonable health. It was time to move toward the things of the spirit. Her travel plans were quite simple. She booked a passage for herself and her son, Jack Lionel, on the Italian liner "Guilio" one of two new luxury vessels that left Cape Town on Friday afternoons. The other one was the "Guilio Cesare". Gittel was hoping that her son Jack Lionel, newly divorced, would find a good woman to marry in Palestine. Her bent was now toward religion and the religious life so she began to wear a "sheitel" or wig over her hair and to minutely observe the mitzvot in a way she had never done before. It was, as I have said before, a kind of preparation for the future, a conditioning for death so to speak.

Jack Lionel agreed to accompany her but refused any of his mother's chosen helpmeets. He was a real dandy who loved to dance and to go to football games. He was also very good looking and certainly not short of lady friends. The thought of a good religious woman from a good family in Palestine held no attraction for him and he returned to South Africa.

I clearly remember the day my grandmother Gittel sailed for Palestine. All twelve grandchildren came to the docks to see

her off. Each was given a parting gift of a slab of chocolate in dark blue paper and one shilling. This was a fortune then when one considers that there were twenty shillings to a pound. One shilling bought a lot of things in those days.

Gittel was dressed in a soft grey silk costume, a heavy gold chain with its sapphire sunburst about her neck and her diamond earrings dangling from under her grey silk swathed toque. She had all her rings on her fingers and a jewelled bracelet around her wrist. She brought her own food which was stored for her in a special corner of the ship's cold storage since all she would eat on board would be fruit. Anything else was not permissible because of her strict observation of Kashrut, the dietary laws. I remember the ship pulling away from the docks, the band playing, the intertwining coloured streamers and people waving. I remember too that my mother wept. Her life had not been easy.

Gittel arrived in Tel-Aviv but stayed there only a short while. She preferred Jerusalem and wintered in Tiberias where she enjoyed the famous hot mineral baths. Until her death in 1943 she lived in a small cottage she had built, with special permission, in the grounds of the United Aged Home in Jerusalem. Later when her health began to fail she moved into the institution itself. Up till then she preferred her independence. The little cottage, as well as most of her possessions she must surely have donated to the home since as far as we can understand nothing was left to anyone. On my first visit to the United Aged Home in search of information pertaining to Gittel's life and death there I had an uncanny experience. An old man who had been a clerk there for over 50 years, a man I had never seen before, looked straight at me as I entered the room. "You are Mrs. Gittel Cohen of South Africa's relation" he said without leaving any margin for

error. "The way you stood there, the way you carry yourself - it's exactly the same. I remember her very well. She was someone not easily forgotten." He then showed me the entry in his ledger of her death - 23rd day of Elul 1943, א"ון , (in Hebrew numerology), corresponding to 28th September, 1943. He also showed me a mahogany framed mirror which she had donated to the office. She had carved her name on it in fine Hebrew capitals. Apparently she had also spent a great deal of her money repairing the women's gallery (Ezrat Nashim) in the synagogue, providing improved sanitation throughout the building and adding some aesthetic touches. From her letters we learned that she had become friendly with the world famous Harav Kook and his family whose sensible, modern approach to Judaism obviously attracted her. Gittel had definitely been there and left her mark!! During her first stay there she bought a house and an orange grove in what is now Rechavia, a prime Jerusalem suburb and tried to encourage my parents (Emily and Zalman) to leave South Africa and settle in Palestine. Both my parents could not see themselves living in the "orient" as they called it and so the house and grove were sold. Like most Jews of my father's type, actually living in Jerusalem was not yet a viable possibility. The traditional concept of "Heavenly Jerusalem" - "Yerushalayim de Maalah" - the intangible, unreachable city of purity and light was more in the nature of a metaphysical concept rather than an actual reality which could never exist until the coming of the Messiah. In his view angels lived in "Jerusalem" and people groped about in "earthly" Jerusalem waiting for redemption.

Gittel, however, found immediate redemption in day-to-day Jerusalem. Worried about her daughter, Emily's difficult life in South Africa, she hastened to Rachel's Tomb, measured out the entire area with red tape and sent it to her to wear

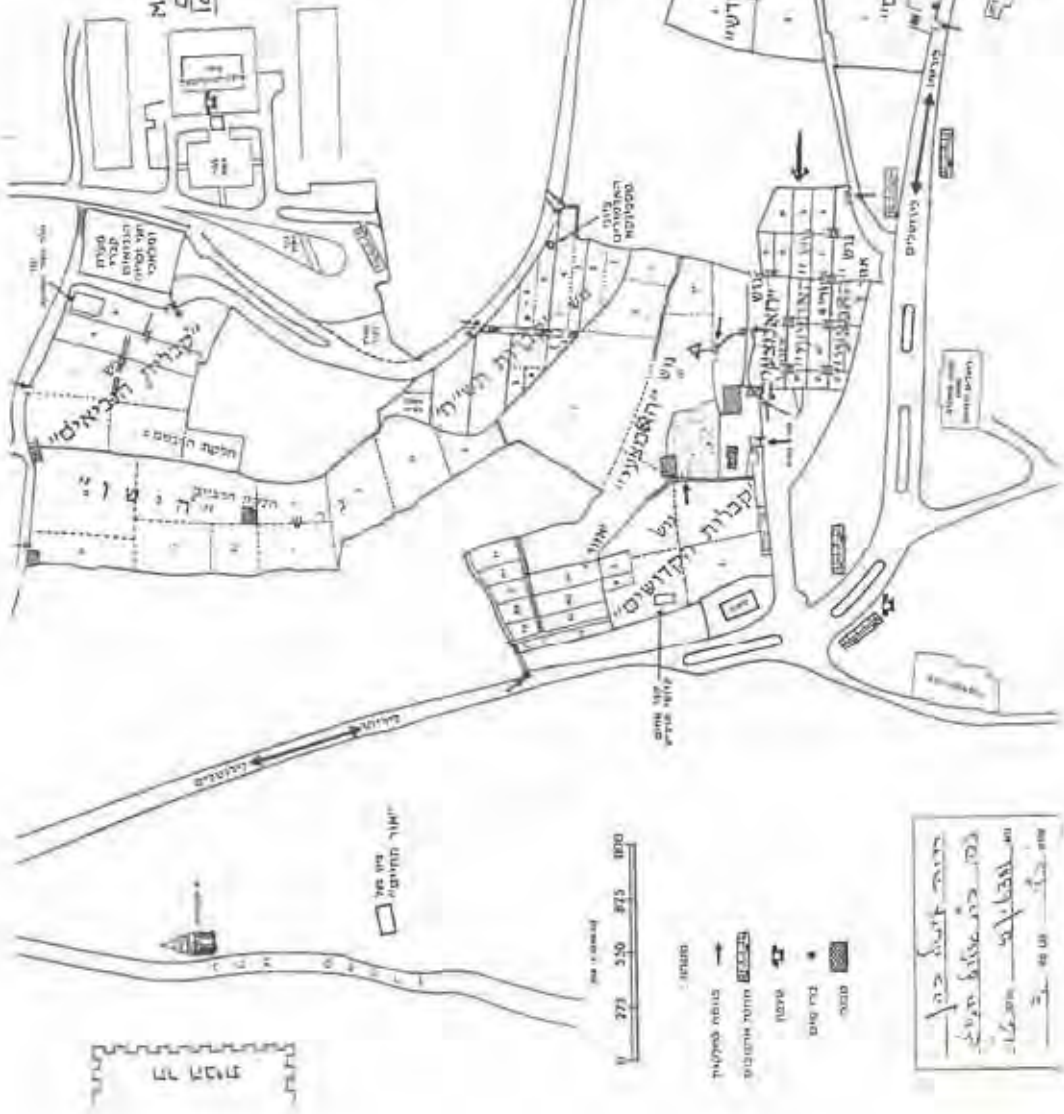
around her neck as a talisman against ill health and difficult times. Jerusalem had changed this hard-headed business woman into a total believer in the magical qualities which existed in every centimeter of that city. From what I have heard she also indulged in a little buying and selling in Jerusalem but I have no proof of this. I remember her letters to my mother describing the beauty of Jerusalem, her train journeys via Haifa and Ras Nakura to Beirut, the Paris of the Lebanon, and Tel Aviv which did not overimpress her. Remember that all this was very much pre-state and Tel Aviv was hardly a city at all.

Gittel's tremendous independence and farsightedness included providing a headstone for her own grave. She could never be sure that any of her children or their offspring would do so or would ever come to Israel but wanted to be sure that if they did they would find her resting place. This is exactly what happened when my cousin Mattie (Dr. Mathias Cohen), Nahum's son, his wife Jean and I went in search of Granny Gittel's grave. Eventually we found it after wandering about the winding alleys of Jerusalem in search of the right Chevra Kadisha that could direct us to the exact spot. Gittel is buried on the Mount of Olives which was in Jordanian hands until the Six Day War of 1967.

Many of the stones had been desecrated, but luckily, not Gittel's. We were able to locate it after investigating the facts concerning her death at the United Aged Home, and later with the help of a map of the cemetery provided by the Chevra Kadisha. We go to visit the grave as regularly as we can to pay our respects to our family's first pioneer in Israel, to our forerunner.

תוכנית תחומי המגורים בירושלים  
 GENERAL CHURCH PARISH  
 1:50,000  
 1:50,000  
 1:50,000

מפה של חומות ירושלים  
 MAP of the Cemetery on the Mount of  
 Olives in Jerusalem. Arrows marks the  
 location of Gittel Chai Cohen's grave



1:50,000  
 1:50,000  
 1:50,000

1:50,000  
 1:50,000

Just before concluding this section on the days and ways of Gittel Chai and Chaim Yitzhak Cohen let me say that, in my view, any of their descendants who have succeeded in business or show high business acumen most definitely have inherited their talents from these two remarkable forbears. While it is true that most of the family have an eye for something good or worthwhile, or even a bargain, there are some who have made it in the world of high finance and commerce. Others in the academic fields have shown equal character. The secret is, of course, to choose the right parents and grandparents!!.

To date there are three of their grandchildren living in Israel; eight great-grandchildren and twelve Israeli-born great-great-grandchildren - Sabras.

GRANDCHILDREN  
LIVING IN ISRAEL

GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN  
LIVING IN ISRAEL

GREAT-GREAT  
GRANDCHILDREN  
BORN IN ISRAEL

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MATTIE COHEN  
RITA (COHEN) LOON  
CLARE (FRIEDLAND) WOLLACH

-----  
JOCELYN (COHEN) BROWN  
SALLY (FRIEDLAND) AHARONI  
SHELLEY (WOLLACH) ZEEVI  
ILANA (WOLLACH) GAASH  
DR. GAIL (LOON) LUSTIG  
ROSLYN (LOON) BUDOW  
STANLEY LOON  
SHELLEY (MICHAELS) OVED

-----  
NURITH BROWN  
ELLA AHARONI  
MIKI ZEEVI  
YONI ZEEVI  
NETTA GAASH  
RACHEL LUSTIG  
DAVID LUSTIG  
MICHAEL LOON  
NADAV OVED  
YARIV OVED  
DANIEL BUDOW  
SHELLEY BUDOW

## GITTEL AND CHAIM COHEN'S OFFSPRING AND THEIR FAMILIES

This exceptional couple produced children of no mean talents. Each, in his own way had something special, some creative gift, social skill or commercial ability. While different in many ways all possessed the high temperamental characteristics and drive attributed to the "COHANIM", the elite priestly sect who administered to the general proletarian mass of Israelites. Unlike the equally elite Levites - the sweet singers of Israel - they were known to be a short-tempered, highly motivated, obsessional, critical breed which demanded perfection of itself and of others.

Most of the males in this family chose wives who could cope with their strong principles, obsessiveness and violent tempers. They provided laughter and brought genuine humour into the home as well as what love, tenderness and romance their lives permitted. It was not that these men did not know how to laugh, love or show tenderness - on the contrary - they cared only too deeply, could laugh at a very good joke and abhorred anything unjust or inferior. They found it difficult to show tenderness or outwardly demonstrate their feelings or communicate emotion lest it be interpreted as weakness. Gittel and Chaim Cohen had set standards difficult to change and models impossible to ignore.

The eldest son, as I have mentioned before was Nahum:

### NAHUM AND REBECCA COHEN AND THEIR FAMILY

Nahum Cohen, Uncle Nahum, my mother's eldest brother was a handsome man who bore a strong resemblance to his father. I can clearly recall his finely featured face and head, his

elegant manner and, despite his medium height, his fine carriage. He wore gold-rimmed spectacles or a pince-nez and was always superbly turned out.

Like many a European scholar before him his handwriting, pure copperplate and, by today's standards, fine calligraphy, was something to behold. He had learned to write in Russian, Polish and German at a gymnasium or high school instead of being sent to a Yeshiva where all secular teaching was banned and considered to be corrupting. While he went to "cheder" and learned what every Jewish child learned in those days, the main body of his education was secular so that on arriving in South Africa as a young man he could easily adjust to the conditions and demands of living there.

Like his father, Chaim Yitchak, whom he accompanied to South Africa, he possessed a volatile temperament. Still, despite this, he had excellent social skills and, according to my mother, was one of the most sought-after young men of his day. Gittel, who spoke Yiddish interspersed with the high sounding German phrases she liked to use, called him "salonfehiq" - acceptable at court, so to speak, like a prince.

Nahum's social skills extended to expert ballroom dancing and being the perfect escort. I can still remember prizes won at ballroom dances which he gave to my mother, his sister Emily, of whom he was singularly fond. A Chinese lacquer jewel box which I still use today, a blue silk embroidered Japanese parasol, an oval-shaped gold watch and a cut-glass bottle of perfume.

In 1923 Nahum married Rebecca Hotz, my Auntie Becky, the auburn-haired daughter of Marcus and Pauline Hotz of

Oudtshoorn, then the ostrich feather capital of South Africa. At that time Oudtshoorn was known as "YERUSHALAYIM D'AFRIKA" "The Jerusalem of Africa" because so many Jewish families had settled there in the wake of the prosperity brought about by the great ostrich feather boom.

Marcus Hotz, the mayor of Oudtshoorn, a moustachiod gentleman whom I can recall seeing on several occasions when he visited his family at the Cape is mentioned in the Afrikaans novel, "Sonde met die Bure" - "Troubles with the Neighbours", by Langenhoven, the Afrikaans writer who also wrote the now controversial national anthem, "Die Stem van Suid Afrika". I also remember my Auntie Becky's mother, Pauline, a sweet European lady, hunched over the piano playing Mendelsohn's Spring Song with the beautiful strands of pearls about her neck almost touching the keyboard.

Most of all I remember Sunday afternoons spent at their home in Rhodesia Rd., Muizenberg. There would always be tea and wonderful home-made brown bread fresh from the oven with butter and jam. No cake in the world ever tasted better to me than that bread. There was also a coffee-grinding machine on the kitchen wall with which we loved to play as children under the watchful eye of old Dora, my aunt's maid, who had come with her from Oudtshoorn. We also spent lots of time watching the trains rushing past the house, back and forth, from Cape to Simonstown.

Becky was a young lady of quality. She possessed excellent secretarial skills and became secretary and later postmistress at the Kamenasie Dam Project after the collapse of the ostrich feather market turned the feather barons, as they were called, into paupers.

Few women went out to work in those days especially not far from home or in outlying places. This, however, is what she did in order to help her family send her brother abroad to study medicine since no medical faculty existed in South African universities at that time. My Auntie Becky was the epitome of gentility, kindness and tolerance and a very special favourite of mine. Unfortunately she died of cancer soon after Nahum's demise, also from cancer at the age of 58.

Nahum and Rebecca had three children. Twins: Dr. Mathias (Mattie) Cohen and his twin sister Joyce Tucker; and Miriam Michaels. Mattie Cohen lives and practices as a specialist anaesthesiologist and general practitioner in Ramat Hasharon, a suburb of Tel-Aviv and is much loved and admired for his remarkable thoroughness, monumental knowledge and almost unbelievable, in this day and age, attention to detail and care of his patients' needs. This of course does not surprise me at all since, taking into account his ancestry, it could not be otherwise.

Mattie and his wife, Jean, nee' Kramer, of Germiston in the Transvaal, whose enormous patience and tolerance one can only admire and envy started their life together at Welkom in the Orange Free State, a town which sprang up in the wake of the discovery of gold in nearby Oudendaalsrus.

Starting from scratch they were instrumental in establishing quite a few of the Jewish institutions there and creating a Jewish life-style and ambience for themselves and others who had settled there. Many of these settlers have since immigrated to Israel and one can meet them at Mattie and Jeans home at Pessach, at the Seder.

Mattie and his brother in law, Dr. Eugene (Tommy) Tucker, practised medicine in Welkom until, soon after the Six Day War in 1967, Mattie emigrated to Israel with his family . He was Gittel and Chaim Yitzchak's second grandchild to follow in her footsteps, arriving soon after we did. Mattie and Jean's children are:

Barbara	- m.Paul Hutt	- U.S.A
Norman	- m.Dr. Renee Scapinka	- South Africa
Rebecca	- m.Ed. Dodd	- U.K
Jocelyn	- m.Yair Brown	- Israel

Joyce, Mattie's twin sister and her family have remained in Welkom. Eugene, a South African Rhodes Scholar in his time is semi-retired. Joyce is a gifted water-colourist specialising in flower paintings which she has exhibited.

Miriam Michaels, the youngest sister, and her husband, Eric, are still living in South Africa. Their daughter Shelley is married to a Sabra, Yossi Oved, of Kibbutz Chanita in the North where they live with their two sons. (Nadav and Yair) Shelley Oved is one of Gittel and Chaim Yitzchak's great-grandchildren who have settled in Israel. The two other children, Julian an architect and Brian, a businessman, live in South Africa.

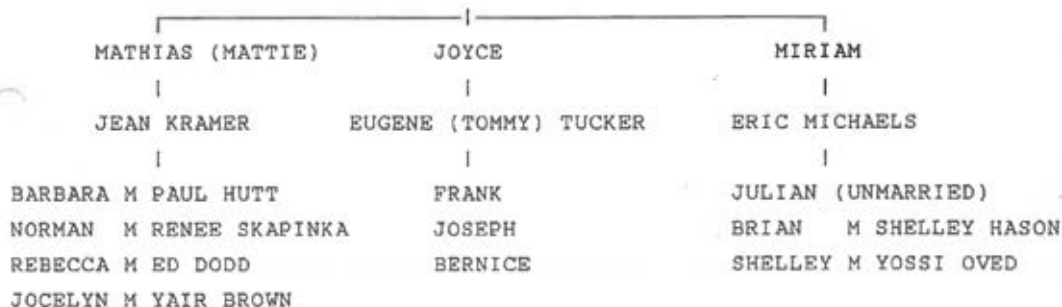


Nahum and Rebecca (Holz)  
Cohen - wedding photo,

In middle age with their  
children: Mattie, Joyce,  
Miriam.



NAHUM COHEN .M. REBECCA (BECKY) HOTZ



## ISIDORE AND YETTA COHEN AND THEIR FAMILY

Gittel and Chaim Yitzchak's second son was always called Azriel by his mother. In Hebrew this name means "God is my help". Gittel who knew well how to delegate tasks to others called him Azriel, "mein hilf", and saw to it that he lived up to his name

In South Africa then, it wasn't considered quite the thing to be called by ones given Hebrew name, especially if one was attending a secular, government department school. Names were anglicized right and left among the immigrants, sticking as closely as possible to the context and sound. So Yaakov became Jack, Nachum - Nahum, Freida Malka - Emily and Joseph, common to both Jews and Christians, remained as it was. How Azriel and other Jewish men of the time came to be called Isidore, a gift from Jesus in Greek, remains a mystery. Perhaps it was because the first two syllables sounded Jewish - who knows? it was, however, completely out of character in Jewish family life but since the giver of the name obviously wasn't aware of its meaning nobody even gave it a thought.

Unlike his brothers, Isidore was no dandy. He was the family workaholic, caring little for the pleasures of the ballroom, theatre, dining-table or female company. He was introspective, serious and shy. My mother used to tell me that it took hours to get him to agree to learn the latest quicksteps, foxtrots and tangos which all his siblings and their friends practised in the family sitting room to the sound of Gittel's red gramophone.

Isidore considered all this a waste of time preferring to run errands for his parents in each of their separate businesses

or to spend his time at the printing works tinkering with the machines. With the passage of time he became an expert on his own machines, fixing and repairing and maintaining them himself, never letting anyone help him. His frugal nature also did not allow him to spend money on things he could do himself. This applied to everything - he was quite content with his frugal way of life and expected, much to the chagrin of his wife and daughters, others to be the same.

Like all the men in his family Isidore was of medium build. He did not inherit his father's fair complexion and aquiline nose but was, instead, sallow-skinned and dark-eyed like his mother with an unusually delicately shaped nose for one of this family. Over the years people remarked that Gittel and Chaim Yitzchak resembled each other because of their strong, aquiline faces. Not so Isidore. He was good-looking without having their sharp features.

Isidore, being the second oldest son and having come to South Africa while he was still a scholar did not continue his formal education. Instead he learned the business and eventually took over the Castle Printing Works on his father's death. Unlike his brothers and sister he never fully mastered the complexities of the English language and always spoke with an accent. He spoke to his parents and siblings in Yiddish interspersed with English phrases. This did not hinder him in finding a wife. In those days couples were introduced to each other by a third party. It was absolutely acceptable, even preferred, since it meant that the third party knew all about the background and parentage and social status of the parties concerned. Since Isidore was not a social animal and needed a push in the right direction an old friend of his parents, one Baruch Chidekel, a man of substance and standing in the community, introduced him, while

strolling on the promenade at Muizenburg (a Sunday ritual at the Cape), to his half-sister, Yetta Smulowitz, newly arrived from Russia to King Williamstown in the Transkei where her brothers ran concession stores.

Yetta Smulowitz was petite and pretty with delicate features and a neat figure. Like most of the women who married Cohen men she too was soft-spoken, uncomplaining and accepted the behaviour of an often irate, overworked husband with aplomb.

I remember her very well. She spoke heavily accented English, loved to wear good clothes and shoes and was very neat in her habits. She kept a dressmaker at home to sew for herself and her daughters and often sought my mother's advice when buying any article of clothing. Like her mother, Emily had marvellous taste and knew how to find the best clothes at equally good prices.

Yetta learned very soon how to deal with her high-powered in-laws and their family. She just retreated into her shell and watched from the sidelines, swallowing her irritation and not getting involved. Yetta and Isidore had four daughters - my cousins Zelda, Riva, Phyllis and Rita - a contemporary cousin for each child in our family.

Zelda, of blessed memory, the family beauty and belle of Cape Town who turned so many heads and broke so many hearts was my older brother, Meyer's peer. Whenever I think of Zelda I see before me those perfect features, hazel eyes and petite figure. She was already going to balls and parties at the age of fifteen in wonderful evening dresses of taffeta and satin and tulle which she bought on the advice of her adored aunt Emily.

Later, as she grew up and purchased other lovely clothes, my cousin Phyllis, my peer, and I would be given them to wear. I can clearly remember a lime green moire' watered silk evening gown with a corsage of gold leather flowers; a figured satin sheath that looked as though it had been hand-painted, a black tulle, rhinestone and pearl gown over black satin with spaghetti shoulder straps studded with diamante and coats and shoes and outfits of all kinds. When Zelda walked into synagogue on Rosh Hashana all eyes were upon her, she was so lovely to look at.

Life, however, was not kind to her. There were three marriages, two of them unsuccessful and the one good one ended in the death of her beloved second husband, Jack Chanarin, who was killed by a reckless driver. There are four children from her first marriage to Ken Davidson: Beverly, Jeffrey, Linda and Nola. Zelda died of a stroke some years back.

Riva, whose peer in our family was my brother Bernard Abraham (Bernie), who died of Multiple Sclerosis after long years of suffering, is Isidore and Yetta's second daughter and the mother of Michael Bear who commissioned this chronicle.

Over and above her typical Cohen heritage of industriousness, endurance, adaptability and correctness, she possesses a rollicking sense of humour which has stood her in good stead throught many trying times. Married to charming Lionel Bear, a mining geologist who came from Dannhauser in Natal, and whose work took him to many trouble spots in the world, Riva has taken such places as Nairobi under the Mau-Mau and Cyprus at war, in her stride, adjusting and re-adjusting to each and every condition of life and seldom complaining.

Riva and Lionel, also called Teddy, for obvious reasons, have three children: Susan, Michael and Denise.

It is very interesting and most relevant to this account to mention that Michael Bear is married to Barbara Sandler who is the great grandchild of Moshe and Chienna Kaplan who were mentioned earlier on. A fuller illustration showing the links between Cohen, Friedland, Kaplan, Dison and Bear families will follow.

Riva, Lionel and all their children live in London. All three are married and have children of their own.

The third daughter, Phyllis Antonis, is my peer. I could write a whole book about our experiences together as children but will restrict myself to a few lines. Suffice it to say that sixty eight years later we are still friends despite ups and downs and long separations and parting of ways. When we meet we can laugh about the old days and wonder what we were so serious about.

Phyllis who is the widow of Dr. Arnold Antonis, an organic chemist of note, lives in Golders Green in North London. She is a child analyst who studied at the the Freud Institute in London. Phyllis has two daughters - Barbara and Sharon - both of whom live and work in England. In the forties Phyllis spent some years in Israel, then Palestine, but returned and eventually, after her marriage, settled in England.

Rita Loon, Isidore and Yetta's youngest daughter is the third of Gittel and Chaim Yitzchak's grand-children to settle in Israel. All three of her children, Gail, Roslyn and Stanley and their children have also settled in Israel so that there are now three great-grandchildren and five of their Sabra



Newly married. Isidore and Yelta (Smulowitz) Cohen.



In middle age with their four daughters — Zelta, Riva, Phyllis, Rita and two sons-in-law Ken Davidson and Dr. Arnold Antonis and two grandchildren Beverly and Jeffrey Davidson.

(Israeli born) great-great-grandchildren and one to come, living here. Rita's peer in our family is my sister Mercia Dison. Her husband, Dr. Donny Loon has adjusted well to Israel and has contributed his vast knowledge of computerized medical informatics to the Maccabi Medical Insurance Company where he is employed. Rita works as a teacher and translator. They live in Tel-Aviv.

ISIDORE COHEN .M. YETTA SMULOWITZ

ZELDA .M. KEN DAVIDSON

|

BEVERLY M LEON KATZ  
JEFFREY M NOLA BLOCK  
NOLA UNMARRIED  
LINDA UNMARRIED

RIVA .M. LIONEL (TEDDY) BEAR

|

SUSAN M. RONNY ENGELBERT: STEVEN, BARRY, CLIVE  
MICHAEL M. BARBARA SANDLER: AMY MARC  
DENISE M. MARIO

PHYLLIS

|

BARBARA M. ROBIN CRIGHTON: ADAM, GEORGIA  
SHARON M. PETE MONIG : BETH, ALANA

RITA M. DR. DONNY LOON (ALL IN ISRAEL)  
DR.GAIL M. DR. SHAMIR LUSTIG :RACHEL, DAVID  
ROSLYN M. DR. MARC BUDDOW :SHELLEY,DANIEL  
STANLEY M. ROSLYN CASSEL :MICHAEL

JACK LIONEL COHEN.M. EVA WOOLF

Uncle Jack's marriage was doomed to failure from the beginning. Gittel Chai and Chaim Yitzchak thoroughly disapproved of his choice and made no bones about it.

The young lady, Eva Woolf, whose mother, a semi-assimilated Austrian Jewess and father, an anglicized Jew, were anathema to them, did not have a chance from the start. But Jack adored her.

As I recall she was very young and pretty if a trifle full-figured; a sporty, modern miss with all the accomplishments of a debutante. She was adept at all the social graces, could sew and embroider, played tennis, drove a car and also smoked cigarettes. Their house had a flood-lit tennis court to which all the eligible young men and women were invited. Nothing could be dearer to Jack's heart. A lover of the good life himself he was instantly attracted by this glamorous world which he knew existed but had never entered. In his own environment Eva's world smacked of frivolity, light-heartedness and behaviour unseemly to Jewish family life. To Gittel and Chaim Yitzchak they were Jews in name only and observed none of the customs incumbent upon Jews.

It just was not good enough for people of their standing in the community. Also, they had other plans for him. It was, to their mind, an almost accepted fact that he would marry the daughter of their neighbours and close friends, the Rose family, whom they saw as excellent in-laws, both for Jack and themselves. Good, steady, honourable, observant Jews with whom they would be able to identify and to communicate easily. They had nothing whatsoever in common with the Woolf family who belonged to an altogether different world. Most of

all they resented the fact that Mr. Woolf wanted Jack, a personable and successful businessman, to leave his father's printing works and join him in his jewellery firm. Gittel had it on authority that his business was failing and that he needed Jack's fine accumen to help drum things up.

Nothing helped and the wedding went ahead. It was a beautiful wedding. I was there, aged six, and remember it in detail. The year was 1930 but brides were still wearing knee-length 'twenties dresses. Eva's headdress was a stiffened lace mantilla which crowned her wavy golden hair and framed her lovely face. They did all the newest dances at which they both were expert and entertained their guests royally. When it was all over and they returned from their honeymoon they set up house in a pleasant villa in Albertyn Rd., Muizenburg.

My mother liked to visit them there and would take us along. She actually liked Eva and found many positive qualities in her. First her femininity and fine accomplishments so different from her own workaday reality impressed her and also the fact that when she came into town to visit she could quite easily muck in and help with the children and the preparation of food.

A tacit truce existed between the two families until Chaim Yitzchak's death. Without thinking too much Mr. and Mrs. Woolf and their four daughters, all dressed in black, arrived at the funeral carrying a wreath, a bottle of wine and a cake. At that moment Gittel's anger at this un-Jewish gesture overflowed its banks and she ordered them out. No amount of explanation would help. She would not relent. So grievous a gaffe could never be wiped out.

Soon after Chaim Yitzhak's death Gittel, after selling her house came to stay with us. As a child I was privy to hushed discussion and arguments between Gittel and her sons and frequent door-slammings and angry exits by Jack after visits with his mother. Something was afoot and the air was electric.

During the next year the scandal broke. People in the compact townlet of Muizenburg who had nothing better to do started a rumour that Eva, who among her other sins, also drove a car, was seen ferrying a handsome Rabbi, newly appointed, to the congregation of Muizenburg, back and forth in her car while carrying on "in an intimate manner". Nowadays this sounds like a bad joke or a soap opera but then it was considered loose behaviour and aroused the most awful suspicions.

The story gained momentum as each and everyone added their version. She was neglecting her one and only child who she left in the care of a white nurse while she gallivanted with the Rabbi.

The Rabbi himself, a man of high-complexion and modern dress, though clean-shaven was very orthodox despite his appearance. His "payot" or sidelocks wer carefully barbered so that they appeared as slight sideburns rather than curls and he wore a hat rather than a yarmulka.

My father was the first to refute this story. He had been instrumental in appointing him as rabbi to the Muizenburg synagogue since he too had studied under the "Hafetz Hayim" of Radin and there could be no doubt at all as to his integrity. It was all the work of envious gossips my father claimed and should be totally ignored.

Eva herself categorically denied each and every one of these accusations and Jack was inclined to believe her but was driven hither and yon by his mother and family. Gossip or not, their blood was up and they would not stand for it.

The crisis came when two of my angry temperamental uncles with Jack in tow, decided that this Rabbi needed to be taught a lesson. They chose no better time than Rosh Hashana, laying in wait for him after the service. What ensued burned up the newspapers. They gave him a beating, smashed his nose and sent him packing while the horrified worshippers, newly refreshed from having made their New Year resolutions and their peace with God and man, looked on. Jack who had been an unwilling participant in all this remained with a broken hand and an even more broken heart.

They were divorced despite Eva's entreaties. He got custody of the child, Neville Ivor, and a long, sad period followed. Jack continued to love Eva all his life and towards the end they came together from time to time until his death. Eva had remarried but is now widowed. Neville is married and lives in Canada. Unfortunately we have lost touch.

To readers of this chronicle today this story may seem ridiculous. "Why didn't he do what he wanted?" Why was he dragged into such a horrible situation against his will? If it happened to me I'd show them - nobody could tell me what to do!" is what they would justifiably say today. Remember only this - the times and mores were entirely different from anything one sees or knows today.

Permissiveness of any kind did not exist, every situation, however innocent could be interpreted as promiscuous and grounds for divorce and every act or utterance was under



*M. Wolpe*

151, TENNESSEE ST.

Jacob Lionel Cohen (Jack)

scrutiny. The rules within the home and outside were rigidly laid down and observed and any infringement, however small or however ridiculous it may appear to be today, could destroy whole lives.

My uncle Jack had panache, charm and good-looks. Life dealt him a nasty blow.

Soon after the divorce and after the scandal died down Gittel got him to accompany her to Palestine with a view to finding him a partner closer to her heart's desire. As we know it didn't work and Jack returned to face his loneliness in Muizenburg, Cape. O tempora, O mores!

JACOB LIONEL (JACK) .M. EVA WOOLF



NEVILLE IVOR COHEN

## EMILY AND ZALMAN FRIEDLAND AND THEIR FAMILY

Earlier on in this account I described the lives of Emily, Gittel and Chaim Yitschak's only daughter, and Zalman Friedland (my parents) in broad outline.

Before going on to describe their lives together let me add a story concerning the family name of Friedland, as it was told to me by my father.

In the early 19th century Jews in Europe were not yet allowed to assume family names and were known by their patronymics e.g. Meir ben Yonah. When Napoleon arrived with his army in the town of Friedland in East Prussia, which he would eventually conquer together with Sadowa, Austerlitz, etc., he looked for a person who could act as quartermaster or inventory-keeper at his camp.

Such a man was Mordechai Ben Meir Yonah who could write German, Russian, Polish and, of course, Hebrew. He did so well that as a mark of honour he was allowed to adopt the name of the city of "Friedland". Mordechai was my father's great-great grandfather.

At the time of her marriage in 1920 Emily was already a seasoned Businesswoman skilled in the arts of buying and selling and creating business wherever she went. Her early training at both parents' knees stood her in very good stead, but she added many new dimensions which grew out of her own strong artistic abilities; qualities which were not always apparent in the way her parents did things. Being younger and more modern in her approach and having benefitted from a less rigid education she was more romantically inclined than her parents, was more daring and had a good sense of humour.



Emily Cohen aged 17  
(1893-1980)



Emily and Zalman Friedland  
on honeymoon 1920



Emily with friends and brother Nahum  
Cohen as chaperone. Emily with dark-  
edged parasol

Zalman, on the other hand, accepted his lot as a businessman, so to speak, with resignation. He had no interest at all in business and so accepted the position of book-keeper and general assistant with equanimity. It was the best he could do and he did it excellently. He was neat as a pin and his entries were always accurate. After his death when we sorted out his papers we were amazed to find every single account, invoice and receipt - every bit of paper, however small or insignificant preserved and accounted for from the very first day he and Emily started business together. This extended to the keeping of all our school reports, cheder reports, music certificates and cuttings pertaining to everything from school sports events in which we participated to little scraps of poetry or prose we might have written for the children's section of the weekend newspaper.

Zalman's main interest lay in serving the now burgeoning Jewish community in Cape Town. Jewish education and the Talmud Torah or "Cheder" as it was called then, were his special goals. He visualized a time when Jewish children would no longer have to attend two schools - a government school in the morning as well as a "cheder" immediately after for most of the afternoons, thus depriving them of leisure hours. Despite the fact that he was a very observant Jew he had an extremely modern outlook for a person of his time.

For years he and his friends went from house to house each Sunday to collect money for Jewish projects. During the depression in the '30's, when South Africa, like many other countries of the world went off the gold standard and people, suddenly poor, were unable to donate to these causes, Zalman helped to found a system which would save rich and poor alike from embarrassment. The letters "chet: "ח" and "yod: "י" in Hebrew numerology add up to "eighteen" - "18" and spell the

word "Chai" (חי) meaning "living or alive". Each person would give "chai prutot", eighteen pence, as his donation even when being called to read the Torah in the synagogue. In this way, despite the depression, Jewish institutions managed to stay afloat. Years later, the dream of a Jewish Day School system incorporating all the requirements of the Department of Education together with additional hours of Hebrew language, history, laws and customs, grammar, tanach came into being. There are Jewish day schools all over the world today.

This kind of anonymity also applied to assistance given by the communal institutions to the needy. The strong ethical injunction of "matan beseter" (giving in secret) was strictly adhered to and Zalman observed it to the letter all his life and maintaining total silence about peoples' private lives in general. This too, was part of his early training by the "Haftor Chaim" who saw the human tongue as a double edged sword capable of destroying entire lives.

In the 'thirties' hundreds of immigrants fleeing Poland, Lithuania and Latvia landed in Cape Town. Funds were found to help them settle in; bursaries and bequests given to promising students and assistance of every kind, physical, spiritual and material was found one way or another. Such help was also found in the 'forties' when victims of the Holocaust, broken in body and spirit came to find long lost relatives who had emigrated to South Africa many years before and were now integrated citizens. This then was Zalman's way of life; the nearest thing to his dreams of a world of the spirit. Harsh reality robbed him of most, if not all of his passionate hopes, but could do not a thing to dim or blunt that fine mind, superb intelligence and purity of heart.



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Letterhead of Emily and Zalman Friedland's  
 shop and the apartments above.



New proprietors, Emily and  
 Zalman with ethnic blankets.



Oranje House today

Zalman's world of the spirit did not help Emily very much. By now she had four children to feed, clothe, educate and rear. The 'thirties' had taken their toll of most business people and it was only with the advent of the second world war that they were able to recover somewhat. There was an embargo on imports at that time owing to the fact that Cape Town, a key harbour, was cordoned off and used solely for military activities. Emily's stocks of silks, cottons, threads and materials, as well as those she had inherited from Gittel jumped sky high. New factories, suddenly deprived of materials due to the blockade, were willing to pay any price for good quality goods and Emily had only good quality goods. That was her motto in life - "we can't afford to buy cheap goods." "Buy one good thing - it will last."

In this way things got better and suddenly there was a radio in the house and a refrigerator and still later an old Packard which my brother Bernie found and got my mother to buy

Up till that time we walked, went by bus or train; kept our food fresh on blocks of ice in a meat safe in the back garden and heated our water with gas. However difficult things might have been we had a rich spiritual life. Apart from all the free concerts we attended by the good graces of Castle Printing Works, my mother, a music-hall fan and an 'habitué' of the old Tivoli and Opera House, used to tell us wonderful stories of those times and on good days used to sing and dance with us around the dining-room table. Deep down she was a true romantic, regaling us with songs such as: "If I should plant a tiny seed of love in the garden of your heart", "After the ball is over" and others which she had heard sung by such artists as Cissie Loftus, Marie Lloyd whom she adored.



Zalman and Emily's family  
at different stages.

Above: In the garden of the  
new house.



Above: Meyer, Bernie,  
Clare, Mercia  
Friedland.

S. H. Friedland

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CAPE TOWN

AFRICA

23 JULY 1934



The last letter from Zalman Friedland's sister to reach him from Lithuania before the entire family perished in the holocaust. Note the date on the envelope



Necha Devorah - Zalman Friedland's sister in Sialwa, Lithuania.



Zalman Zvi (Solomon Harry) Friedland in old age with a book as usual

But she was strict too and could become very angry when crossed. She demanded perfection from us - not 98% but 100% - "what happened to the other 2%?" she would want to know. And handwriting - her own was beautiful each link, loop and letter perfectly formed - woe betide any child who smudged or blotted or didn't write clearly, or didn't practise the piano, or didn't get to the top of the class. She set norms of excellence which no-one could meet except, perhaps, my brother Bernie, who seemed somehow able to satisfy those standards. I'm convinced to this day that she played the favourites when it came to him or that he knew how to cajole and bewitch her.

The rest of us limped along. It was many years before any one of us could feel confident about work we had produced or projects we had undertaken. The yardstick for excellence would always remain hers.

Still, Emily gave us a sense of history and continuity. Her "family" stories, faithfully told and retold remain, as can be seen from this account, with me and my siblings and my children and their children to this day.

Zelman and Emily had four children:

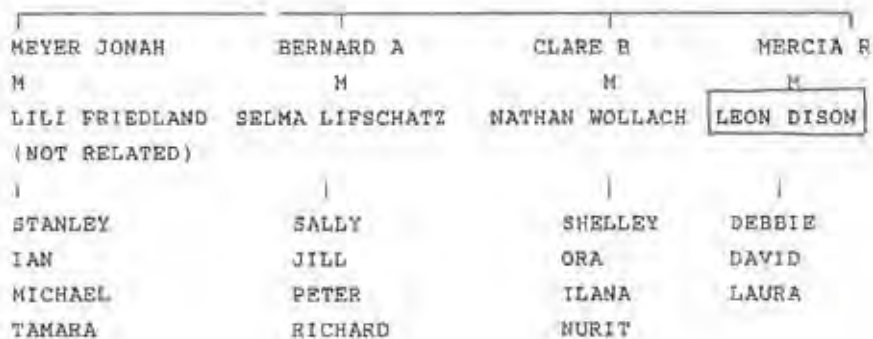
Meyer Jonah

Bernard Abraham

Clare Brenda

Mercia Ray

EMILY COHEN .M. ZALMAN FRIEDLAND



Zalman Friedland died in 1952 at the relatively young age of 64. He cared little or nothing about his health and in his entire life may have seen a doctor once or twice.

Emily continued to run her business until the age of 75. Once she retired she deteriorated steadily and died in 1986 aged 87.

Three of Zalman and Emily Friedland's children have survived.

The eldest son, Meyer Jonah, is a master electrician and lives in Orange Grove, Johannesburg with his wife, Lily, also Friedland, but unrelated. His son, Stanley is a businessman in the U.S.A and is unmarried. His second son, Ian, is a Chartered Public Accountant in Johannesburg and married. His third son, Michael, is married and practices as an anaestheologist in Canada. One daughter, Tamara, is married and has three children. She works as a secretary.

Bernard Abraham (our beloved Bernie) died recently after a long battle with multiple sclerosis. He was a civil engineer by profession. In 1948 Bernie went to Israel to fight in the War of Liberation like several other young professionals at that time he abandoned his job to go to war. His wife Selma nee' Lifschatz, is a teacher and lives in Johannesburg.

Sally Friedland Aharoni, their eldest daughter, is a well known dancer who lives round the corner from me in Tel Aviv, Israel. She has one daughter, Ella.

Jill Margo, her sister, a journalist, lives with her husband, Robin, a barrister, and their three children in Sydney, Australia.

Peter and Richard Friedland, twin brothers, are both vets and now medical doctors as well. Peter is married and has two children and Richard is still single. It is interesting to note that both men who were brought up in a totally secular home have now turned to religion and are keen to learn everything about their grandfather, Zalman Friedland and his life as an orthodox Jew and about his mentor, the "Chafetz Chaim".

Clare Friedland (Wollach) married (in 1947) to the late Nathan Wollach whose family immigrated to South Africa from Poland in 1934. Nathan was a businessman of some quite considerable talent but was an even more talented actor, performer and painter who was forced by his father's early death, to go into business to support a family of five children and an ailing mother. He died in 1967 soon after our family immigrated to Israel in 1964.

I, myself, as can be seen from this chronicle am something of a wordsmith by choice and a teacher by profession. I translate texts of all sorts, edit, proofread, write and review both art exhibitions and books and sometimes sub-title documentary films for television or write catalogs for galleries. My house is in Tel Aviv, Israel. My children are:

Shelley Wollach (Zeevi) born 1949) who lives in Ramat-Gan, Israel with her two children Miki and Yoni, is the most competent secretary I know and whose assistance in the putting together of this chronicle is invaluable. She is a gifted linguist and story-teller with a retentive memory. No longer married to her former husband David Zeevi she works as a secretary and looks forward to the day when she can go and study to be a qualified tour-guide and ballroom dance to her heart's content.

Dra Wollach (Villalobos) (born 1953) lives with her husband Luis Villalobos in Irvine, California. She is a fashion designer/consultant who runs her own business while her husband is a brilliant investments and development consultant. Like Gittel and Chaim Yizchak they do things separately and together.

Ilana (Lali) Wollach (Gaash) (born 1954), at present serving with her husband David Gaash (Grossman) with the Israeli Consulate General in Sydney, Australia, is an art therapist by profession. They have one daughter, Netta. When they are in Israel they live in Ramat Hasharon. Their last tour of duty was in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia where they took part in transporting the Falashas to Israel.

Murith Wollach (Chocron) (born 1957) is married to Lucien (Lior) Chocron of Casablanca, Morocco. They live in Los Angeles, California where she practises as a clinical psychologist. Lucien is a businessman. They also have a house in Natanya Israel to which they might return some day.

Mercia (Friedland) Dison, the youngest of Emily and Zalman's children who, with her husband, Leon Dison, plays an important role in the forging of the second strong link between the families, is an educational psychologist. Her husband is a civil engineer. They live in Johannesburg, South Africa and have two surviving children, Adv. David Dison and Laura (Dison) Sieff, an educationalist.

Their eldest daughter, Deborah (Debbie) who was tragically killed in a motor accident, was a brilliant young advocate who, despite her own severe physical handicap, having been a polio victim, waged an increasing battle for civil and legal

rights for the black people. Laura and David and their spouses are equally involved in the struggle for democracy in South Africa.

This then, in very broad outline, is an account of Zalman and Emily Friedland's children and their children.

JOSEPH SAMSON COHEN

Joseph Samson, the youngest of Gittel and Chaim Yitzchak's children was also the saddest and most unfulfilled.

He started out by being a forward-looking young person, eager to break with the family tradition of business and doing his utmost to matriculate into a university abroad where he could study medicine.

Joe, as we always called him, was a very heavy sleeper. Since he and a friend of his who lived in the same building used the early morning hours to study, the friend, an early-riser, would pull on a string which ran all the way up the side of the building and was attached to Joe's wrist. Like this, at four-o'clock in the morning they would study for the matriculation. All this took some years. In the meantime the First World War had broken out and Joe, in his headstrong way, ran off to join the heavy artillery. His parents, to whom war was anathema, who had seen hundreds of young men injure themselves physically in order not to serve in the army, or steal away over the borders of Russia in the dead of night, found this act difficult to accept. They tried every means at their disposal to try get this folly annulled, but to no avail. At a time when it was considered cowardly even traitorous not to join up, this was an almost impossible mission. Young men who had not enlisted would be sent anonymous letters with white feathers enclosed as a mark of their cowardice and were ostracized socially. So it was useless to try to undo anything. Finally, with the help of his older brother Nahum who had some connections, Joe was sent to German South West Africa and stationed at the army postal services there until the end of this war in 1918 when

he returned briefly to South Africa and then left for Glasgow, Scotland, where he had been accepted into the medical faculty.

As we can see from the postcards sent to his family at the time his state of mind in South West Africa was low. He was obviously angry with his family for having interfered and bored and depressed by the surroundings and the job itself. The messages are impersonal and curt and, beyond some geographical data, there is nothing on the feeling level at all.

For the first few years of study in Glasgow Joe excelled. When he was in his fourth year some break seemed to have occurred - enough to worry Gittel who detected a restlessness in his letters and had also gleaned bits of troubling information about the state of his health from vacationing student colleagues.

In 1923 Gittel journeyed to Glasgow to try to convince him to give up medicine which she claimed ruined ones health, took all ones time and brought little or nothing in the way of profits. Joe must have been feeling low at that time or he would never have agreed to interrupt his studies and accompany his mother back to South Africa. It is interesting, even curious, that when my younger brother Bernard Abraham (Bernie) wanted to study medicine, my mother refused point blank to allow him to do so and urged him to become a Civil Engineer instead. He never forgave her for it and hated engineering all his life.

After a year in South Africa during which time he managed to make some money Joe returned to Glasgow to complete his studies. During vacations he signed on as a "ship's doctor"

so as to further finance his studies; a job often given by shipping lines to final year medical students. The photo he sent home shows him on board a ship in 1930, going up the St. Lawrence River in Canada; a happy time in his life.

It was not long after this that my uncle Jack was sent to the island of Madeira to fetch his brother Joe who had jumped ship there on his way back to South Africa. Apparently he had been rescued by fishermen and brought to one of the monasteries which sent word to my grandmother. He had obviously suffered some mental breakdown and was promptly brought to live with us until other arrangements could be made.

One must realise that psychiatry and psychological assistance of any kind were in their absolute infancy in those times. There was, however, one psychiatrist in Cape Town who suggested hard, physical work - manual labour - as a cure for conditions of this kind. So Joe was sent to a farm near Firgrove in the Cape run by a dour Scottish lady called Mrs. Stuart who took in people who had suffered breakdowns and put them to work among the cows and chickens while providing good food, fresh air, rigid discipline and shelter.

Later Joe was removed to a tiny row house in Muizenberg on King George Drive, where he spent his days swimming and walking. I remember that the walls of his cottage were full of handwritten mottos and proverbs and sometimes when we came to visit him and he was in a talking mood he would teach them to us.

Despite his deep depression and its accompanying symptoms Joe maintained an outward elegance and gentlemanliness. He was the only one who could get my daughter, Shelley, to eat an egg



Joseph Samson Cohen (Joe)  
as "ship's doctor" on the St.  
Lawrence River, Canada, 1930



On the beach at Muizenberg  
with friends circa 1921



One of the postcards sent by Joe from German South West Africa in 1915.



Debbie Dison - Mervia and Leon Dison's eldest daughter who will always remain in the family's memory for her courage, brilliance and morality. She inherited all the best of her ancestor's sterling qualities as well as their drive and imagination and high work ethic. Anyone who met her will remember her forever.

## Debbie

## Dison — one

## last

## legal victory



Debbie Dison ... always shining and bright

"DEBBIE Dison killed in crash" That is the reality, the headline tells the story. But only a tiny part of it.

It doesn't tell of the real loss — of the disbelief and the horror and the spark that went out of the lives of family and friends when the news began to filter through.

And it doesn't begin to tell what an indescribably cruel blow was struck when her car turned over on that gravel road in Zimbabwe killing her and her friend, Maxwell Berran.

What died that day was not simply a bright, articulate, young lawyer. It was a spirit of extraordinary courage and determination.

Who was she? Not famous, not a celebrity. So why write about her?

Because she was special. Because she cared. Because her life touched on and improved so many other lives. Because she did so much for so many people. Because Debbie Dison was one of the bravest people I have ever known. And one of the most remarkable.

Paralysed from the neck down by polio at the age of three, she made her way through life in callipers, propelled with the help of a pair of sticks. And smiling. And never letting her disability get in the way of anything she wanted to do.

It wasn't simply that she didn't complain — her enjoyment of life and her zest for everything it had to offer would have been extraordinary in somebody completely healthy.

Six major operations maimed her 27 years but nothing ever seemed to get her down.

Her mother recalls that, "even at primary school, she was always shining and bright".

A school career of leadership; fond memories of the girl with the grin at the top of the stands of cheering high schoolers at the inter-high; an historic picture of Debbie on the three-spy Wits SRC; Debbie helping workers at the Industrial Aid Society; starting out on a career of labour law... fragments of the picture.

Her first degree was not concerned with law at all. Encouraged by her mother who felt it was important that she got "insight into herself", she studied psychology and, far from needing to have her psyche nursed, went on to be a mentor to many of her friends.

"She was a very strong person. She transcended the physical handicap all the way."

Nothing infuriated her more than other people trying to help her. It might take her 10 minutes to work her way up a few steps but you knew somehow that you did not offer her a hand.

"Her whole strength was that she wasn't afraid to deal with things."

Typically, because her concern was always for other people, her law career was devoted to public interest law — law for those for whom the law is normally out of reach.

The Industrial Aid Society, Actisop (the committee formed to halt group areas evictions), the Metal and Allied Workers Union, Fosatu (the Federation of South African Trade Unions) and, in the past year, the newly-formed Legal Resources Centre were Debbie Dison's constituency.

Her last legal victory she never knew about — thanks to her work, Mrs Velapha Mngadi will have her home back but news of the successful appeal came through after Debbie died.

"She was involved in helping everybody else. She was available to so many people at any time," says Mrs Dison.

"Her house was always full of people," recalls a friend.

"Perhaps the most extraordinary of her gifts was the ability to make contact with people from widely differing circles. In South Africa, it is a quality of inestimable value and one not easy to maintain," reads a line from one of the many letters her family has received.

Death came to Debbie Dison at the cruellest moment. At a high point, she was about to embark on a new job, another first, a new firm of attorneys, carrying her idealism and expertise into a new life.

The presence of scores of people of all ages, all colours, all creeds, all corners of life, who walked in Tuesday's icy rain down the paths of West Park Cemetery was a testimony, if any was needed, to the love she inspired.

She died on the brink of something so exciting; she was so totally happy, totally committed to a lively, challenging future, it is hard not to feel that there is no justice in a fate that picks off the Debbie Disons.

Yet, in that just for living, lies some little consolation: "We're hanging onto the fact that she packed so much into her life," says her mother.

sunny side up with bread cut into the most perfect diamond and heart shapes(while sitting on the table). My mother was among the very few who could get through to him and he trusted her enough to let her feed him all her home-made remedies and nostrums even when he lay in hospital.

At the end of his life when neglected diabetes ravaged his body and necessitated the amputation of his leg he remained the perfectly mannered gentleman I remembered as a child. He refused point blank to allow the doctors to take his leg and preferred to die. He was under sixty years of age and left neither wife nor child.

Joe's death brings to a close the saga of Gittel Chai and Chaim Yitzchak Cohen's lives - their beginnings in Russia - Poland; their lives in South Africa - Israel and something of the lives of their children and children's children.

## THE FRIEDLAND DISON LINK

The link between the Kaplan and Friedland family as well as the friendship which existed between the Kaplans and Cohens - Chienna and Moshe and Gittel Chai and Chaim Yitzhak - was referred to, in broad terms, earlier in this narrative, as well as the step-relationship of Zalman Friedland.

In 1915 Jenny Kaplan married Levi Dison who had immigrated to South Africa around 1910 (almost the same time as Zalman Friedland) from Shadova in Lithuania. He was one of ten children, eight of who immigrated to South Africa at different stages of their lives. At the beginning of their married lives they went to live at Knight's Deep in one of the rural towns which had suddenly sprung up around the mines and opened a concession store there.

Levi's family name was -Dison- in Yiddish or German and meant "the sun". The Afrikaners speaking people with whom he came into contact pronounced it "Die Son" (also meaning the sun) and so it remained, somewhat Anglicized - Dison.

To us as children Auntie Jenny and Uncle Levi were part and parcel of our family. The fact that they were, in reality, only faintly related to us, made no difference. The friendship existed between the old couples, the Kaplans and the Cohens, long before Zalman Friedland arrived on the scene. His marriage to Emily, their daughter, only enhanced the family relationship. In any event children in those days never spoke to older people without calling them "auntie" or "uncle". An elder person automatically became your "relative" - a mark of respect, so to speak. It could never happen that a child would refer to an adult by his given name. However true this might have been, it was not the case in our

The marriage of  
Jenny Kaplan to  
Levi Dison in 1915

Seated: (l. to r.)

Levi Dison's mother

Chienna Kaplan -

Jenny's mother.

Standing: (l. to r.)

Rose Dison Gelvan

Sam Kaplan

Levi Dison

Jenny (Kaplan) Dison

Moshe Kaplan - Sam

Jenny's father

Mr. Mrs. Rathhouse (Close

friends)



relationship with Jenny and Levi Dison and their family. We felt genuinely related even though we saw them very seldom, perhaps once a year when they came on holiday to the Cape and visited with our parents. We, as children, felt very closely related to Jenny's mother and father, my father's uncle and aunt.

My father, Zalman, who was specially attached to his aunt Chienna, never missed dropping in to see her each day on his way to the shop. On Saturday evenings the old couple would visit with us or Chienna would come alone if Moshe was busy. We used to love going to her shop in Buitenkant St. where she would pack our pockets full of sweets. In this way we kept in touch with this family and heard all the news about Jenny and Levi's children as well as their son Sam's family who lived in Pretoria.

Later Jenny and Levi Dison moved to Standerton, the parliamentary constituency of the famed South African Prime Minister, Jan Christiaan Smuts, where they ran a mill together with Levi's brothers and where all their children grew up.

In actual fact I really got to know Jenny and Levi Dison and their family much later on when they retired and moved from Standerton to Johannesburg. Whenever we came to Johannesburg we would stay at their home in Greenside and, in this way, got to know them quite well.

Levi Dison, a softly-spoken, well-built man looked amazingly young and fit for his age. He had an erect carriage and a fresh complexion and was very quiet by nature. Even though he too had been a yeshiva student at some stage of his life he was, unlike my father, a totally secular person, never

imposing any sort of religious practice on any of his children. Jenny Dison was one of the most diplomatic people I have ever met. She had a way of avoiding unpleasant situations that was tantamount to an art. Her skill at redirecting a conversation which seemed to be going the wrong way was something to behold. She too was a totally secular person observing little or nothing of religious customs and not expecting anyone else to do so. She was very bitter about the plight of women, among them her mother, who had had to bear the brunt of bearing, rearing as well as providing the livelihood while her husband studied the Torah and Talmud. She saw them as victims and openly decried and abhorred the restrictions which, in her view, accompanied religious observance. So, Jenny was very modern in her outlook, read a great deal and even though she had trained as a teacher, did not continue with it.

Jenny and Levi Dison had four children, three daughters and one son. The eldest daughter, Dorothy, is married to Dr. Mendel Spitz and after many years of living in Kinross in the Transvaal, now lives in Clifton, at the Cape. They have three daughters and one son.

The second daughter, Nita was married to the late Rudi Liebmann, an immigrant to South Africa from Darmstadt-Aochaffenburg in Germany. They have three sons. Nita lives in Johannesburg.

Sylvia, or Tibby, as she is called, was married to the late Dr. Archie Sandler of Johannesburg. They had four daughters and lived in Klerksdorp in the Transvaal until his death. Tibby, who lives in London and works as a speech-therapist, joined three of her daughters who live there with their families.



The marriage of Mercia (Friedland) and Leon Dison

Front Row: (from l. to r.) Levi and Jenny (Kaplan) Dison, Leon and Mercia Dison, Sylvia (Tibby) Dison Sandler, Emily and Zalman Friedland, Rita (Cohen) Loon.

Second Row: Zelda (Cohen) Davison with Beverly Selma (Hipschaw) Friedland, Clara (Friedland) Wallach, Meyer Friedland, & Donny Loon, Taube Wolf.

Third Row: Isidore Cohen, Joyce (Cohen) Tucker, Yetta (Smulowitz) Cohen, Nathan Wallach, Jack Lionel Cohen, Rebecca (Holt) Cohen, Mrs. Hipschaw.

Top Row: Matthias (Mattie) Cohen, Neville Ivor Cohen, David Fayes, Lemia Dison, Bernard Abraham Friedland, Ronald Wallach, Lionel Hipschaw.

LEVI & JENNY (KAPLAN) DISON

ZALMAN & EMILY (COHEN) FRIEDLAND

DOROTHY	NITA	LEON	SYLVIA	MEYER	BERNIE	CLARE	MERCIA
M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
M.SPITZ	R.LIEBMANN	MERCIA	A.SANDLER	LILY	SELMA	NATHAN	L. DISON

Leon Dison and his  
wife Mercia (Friedland)  
Dison. The second  
link in the cross-cross  
family chain.

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Old friends now family  
Jenny Dison and Emily Friedland  
(Kaplan)



David Dison great-grandson of  
Chaim Yitzchak and Gittel Cohen and  
Moshe and Chienna Kaplan with  
Jenny Dison - great-great-grand-  
daughter.



Laura Dison  
Sieff with Danie  
-great-great-  
grandson of  
Chaim Yitzchak  
and Gittel Cohen  
and Moshe and  
Chienna Kaplan



Leon, Jenny and Levi Dison's only son, is married to my sister Mercia Friedland. He is a civil engineer and she an educational psychologist. They live in Johannesburg. Their two children and their families are also in Johannesburg.

The marriage of Leon Dison to Mercia Friedland is a significant second link in the criss-crossing of the Cohen, Kaplan, Friedland and Dison families. The union between Zalman Friedland's daughter and his step cousin Jenny's son forges an even stronger bond between the two slightly related families as well as between their old friends, the Kaplan and Cohen families.

### THE THIRD LINK - DISON-COHEN-BEAR FAMILIES

Riva cohen, the second eldest daughter of Isidore and Yetta Cohen married Lionel (Teddy) Bear of Dannhauser in Natal.

As was mentioned in broad outline earlier on Lionel's work as a mining geologist took them to quite a few far-flung places, very often trouble spots. My cousin Riva used to tell stories of how difficult life under the Mau-Mau uprising in Kenya had been and later, in Cyprus, before the actual division of the island took place.

One of my best memories of Cyprus is connected with a visit I made to them there in 1960. I was on the way to my first visit to Israel and to tour the Island. Riva, Teddy and their three children lived in the British compound in Nicosia. I remember them coming to meet me at the little airport, the three children with their hands full of fresh cyclamen and their parents close behind.

And what a time it was! Lionel had mapped out a wonderful touring plan so that I would miss nothing. Riva in her little Triumph car drove me everywhere and showed me Cyprus, then undivided, in a way neither I nor anyone else will see again. I shall never forget the magical quality of Berengaria's Castle, a tavern in the mountain caves of Kyrenia where we joined the singing, guitar strumming locals in their light Lent meal; the ornate Dome Hotel in Kyrenia and Richard the Lionheart's fortress; Othello's tower and the ancient Greek theatre on the beach at Salamis. And, lunch in Metaxas square and so many little sidestreets and byways, many of them quite seriously riddled by bullets which, luckily, we did not encounter.

The children, Susan, Michael, and Denise all living in London today, were sent to boarding schools in Britain when Cyprus could no longer provide a suitable educational framework for them. Today they live and work in London with their families.

The third link in the interwoven family pattern was forged by the marriage of Riva & Lionel Bear's son, Michael, to Barbara Sandler, the daughter of Sylvia (Tibby) Dison Sandler and the late Dr. Archie Sandler and granddaughter of Jenny and Levi Dison and great-granddaughter of Chienna and Moshe Kaplan. Barbara, one of the four Sandler sisters - Heather, Barbara, Patricia and Joy, is the second eldest. She is a gifted musician and sculptress. Michael and Barbara have two children, Amy and Marc.

To sum up:

We have now established that three strong links unite this family which had its beginnings in the Polish Pale of Settlement and in Lithuania and has ramifications all over the world.

The triple alliance between the Cohen-Bear-Dison families is especially fascinating and represents an interesting anthropological picture of cross-kinship.

People nowadays are looking for their roots, trying to reconstruct their beginnings or to establish points of departure from which they can trace not only the names of their forbears but also something of the genetic qualities which have appeared and re-appeared in different family members.

Full Circle.

Michael Bear great-grandson  
of Chaim Yitzchak and Gittel Cohen.

Barbara Sandler great-grand-daughter  
of Moshe and Chienna Kaplan

School children are being taught to work out family trees so that in these times, when the strong family framework is slowly but surely being eroded, they can, at least identify with some distant ancestor and perhaps establish mental images which link them to their histories.

Memory, of course, is the key. It was, during the course of preparing this account, amazed to discover that many of the family members to whom I posed questions could barely, if at all, recall events, details, people or significant happenings in their family's history. Many of the people, names and places meant nothing to them even though from time to time I did encounter one or two family members who did actually recall events and possessed photographs which they had inherited from their parents and which they were reluctant to part with. These they were happy to place at my disposal and for this, my thanks.

My thanks also to my daughter, Shelley Zeevi, who has total recall of every detail of every tale I ever recounted about my family and whom I asked to write an epilogue to this chronicle. Her charming additions round out my own account lending it both richness and credibility

GITTEL & CHAIM COHEN	CHIENNA & MOSHE KAPLAN
ISIDORE & YETTA COHEN	JENNY & LEVI DISON
RIVA COHEN	SYLVIA(TIBBY) LEON DISON
M	M
LIONEL BEAR	ARCHIE SANDLER MERCIA FRIEDLAND
MICHAEL BEAR	BARBARA SANDLER
M	M
BARBARA SANDLER	MICHAEL BEAR

This tree shows that Mercia(Friedland) Dison is aunt by her marriage to Leon Dison, to Barbara Bear and through her first cousin Riva (Cohen)Bear, second cousin to Michael Bear and step-cousin three time removed to Tibby (Dison) Sandler via Zalman Friedland.

## EPILOGUE

Michael, Susan and Denise - I wonder if you remember a summer we spent together at your house in Fish Hook?

Well, cousins, here you have it. A full account of a family history.

My mother has given me carte blanche to write an epilogue and while I am not certain that I am deserving of the honor I wish to say that everything in this chronicle is deeply part and parcel of my upbringing, my daily life and that of my children. Judging from my affront when I discovered that precious details had been 'omitted' or something not told exactly as it was told to me, I guess I must have absorbed it all very deeply and taken it all very seriously.

As children we were regaled with all the contents of this account and I am intimately familiar with each and every detail in it and can vouch for its accuracy in so far as it was told to me. I am only sorry that it is not possible to put in details like the evening dresses the girls wore, my granny Emily's hats, her hat pins and her lace collars, or the way in which my grandfather faithfully brushed his one and only suit every night before hanging it up to be worn the next day; granny Emily's chiffon cake made without any mechanical mixing equipment, baked without a thermostat in a coal-stove.

Obviously the purpose of this account is not that. Having read it it is only now that I have fully realized the immense value of a written account. Not only have the details been faithfully recorded but here we can see exactly who we are and who we take after.

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Maybe I am a nostalgic sentimentalist longing for a more gracious world but to me the details, having been savoured and treasured have become not only a family history but also a form of family entertainment.

Our generation cannot conceive of all the do's and don'ts of that society nor do we know anything about disgraced women - "blossoms in the dust", being in disgrace or the fear of being scrutinized by God himself. It would not occur to any of us to do something we do not wish to do, wear, eat and we cannot conceive of a world in which physical deformities and most ailments were uncorrectable, incurable or fatal. Our parents grew up in times when the first airplanes were watched until they became tiny specks in the sky bearing Amy Johnson or some such adventurer to her next destination around the globe; when the radio was a crystal and cat's whisker to be played with by a child when sick in bed; when a "penny lick" was a treat.

No - I'm not telling you to eat because there are hungry starving masses in India! All I am saying is that this is your heritage. These are the people you stem from - salt of the earth. Read, savour and tell your children all you know. Preserve it and be proud.

When listening to my mother's stories I often wonder how they all survived and yet it was probably that very upbringing itself which made them all such sterling people.

I am proud to have given my small contribution and hope that I have helped to make this chronicle something you will treasure and pass on.

Shelley Zeevi (Wollach)  
Ramat Gan, Israel

White Wings

27/13 Point Map

1. Area

2. Area