

The Barnett Story

The Barnett saga as remembered from anecdotes and stories told to me by my late mother-in-law, Mary Barnett (Katz) born in Baltimore, Maryland, USA.

The Katz's

Mary's maternal grandmother, Liba Plain lived to 103. Her sister Rose Kramer lived to 101. In fact she was still alive in 1969 when Issy and I visited the USA. However, due to Ida's (Mary's sister) jealousy and idiosyncrasies, she would not take us to visit her or even give us the addresses of the family in New York. Rose's daughter, Mollie Moran and her husband built one of the roller coasters at Coney Island.

Mary was born May 23, 1897 and brought up in Baltimore. Her mother Freda apparently was quite a character and was married five times. She ran an eating house on the docks in Baltimore. There she learned of ports of call from the sailors who



patronized her establishment. She was intrigued by the duty free port of Lourenco Marques, Mozambique, previously known as Portuguese East Africa. Being an adventurous and fearless spirit she decided to go and investigate the possibilities there. On the way there she stopped in both Capetown and Durban, South Africa but found those places too staid for her liking. She had placed her children in an orphanage in Baltimore pending the outcome of her decision about Lourenco Marques.

When she decided to settle there in 1904, she sent for her brood of five. Ida and one brother, Louis were with her first husband, Mr. Share. She adopted a son with her second husband, Mr. Levine -

that son died at a young age. Mary, Molly and a brother Israel were with her third husband, David Katz. Her fourth husband was Mr. Lustig with whom she had no children. Freda's fifth husband, in later life, turned out to be Reuben Barnett (Judah's father), after his first wife Rachel had died.

Life there was very primitive – hard and unlike the orthodox upbringing in Baltimore, very unsettling for her family. One by one the older children went back to the USA and only Mary, the youngest aged 11 remained with her mother. Her life was difficult as her mother was very strict and hard on her. In 1915, Mary at age 18 married Judah Barnett (Morris), whose family had emigrated there from London, England. Mary and Molly were the only ones to have children of their own.

The Barnett's

The Barnett (Morris) family had emigrated from Poland and settled in London in the 1860/1870's. The family name was originally Morris (maybe even something similar) but somewhere along the way it was changed to Barnett. There are two stories as to how the last name Morris was changed to Barnett. One was that when Reuben arrived in Lourenco Marques there was another man with the name Reuben Morris, no relation. Reuben felt that in such a small Jewish community it would be confusing to have the two of them with the same last name and so he changed it to Barnett. As to why he chose Barnett is not clear. Some say it was because he had worked in a kosher butcher shop in the White Chapel area of London named 'Barnet' that had served the King, that he took the last name of Barnett. The second story is that Reuben had a brother already in Lourenco Marques by the name of Barnett Morris. All the locals knew him as Mr. Barnett and so when Reuben came, it was confusing to them how two brothers could have different last names. So once again it is told that Reuben changed his last name to Barnett. I have not been able to establish whether either story is the true one or which one it is. Hence the Morris-

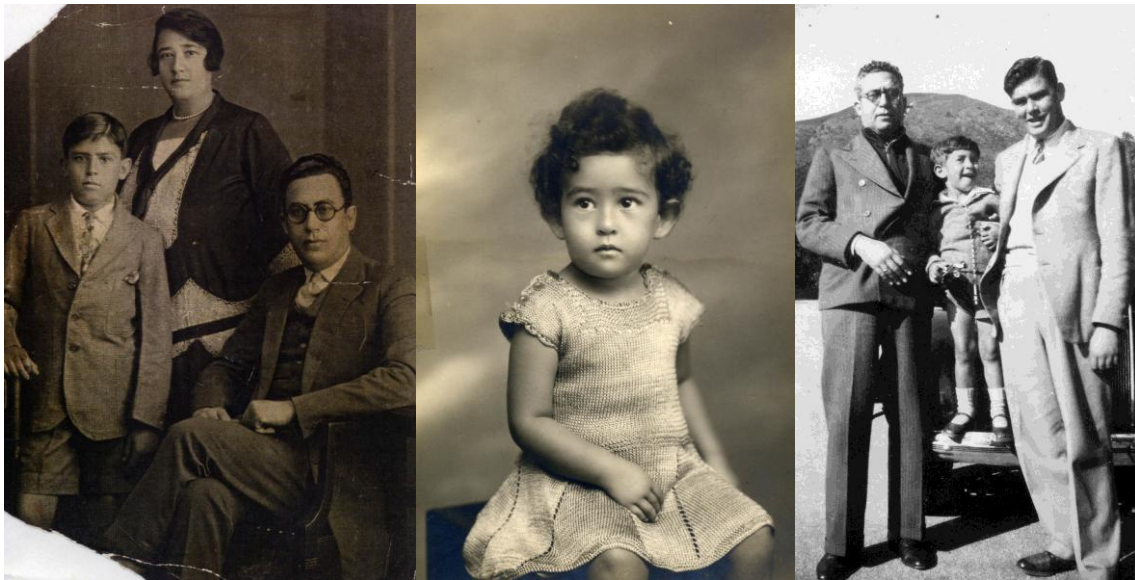


Barnett connection. The background and relationships of the family are very vague. There is a Chaitowitz, Spectre, King and Abraham connection somewhere in England.

Reuben Barnett married Rachel Israelowitz. Reuben had one brother, name unknown. Rachel was one of six children. She had three sisters and two brothers. Together they had 8 children: Joe, Judah, Sam, Willie, Becky, Dora, and Esther. Their fourth daughter died at a very young age. Judah was born December 1, 1892. Reuben seems to have been a bit of a rolling stone as he could never hold down one job for any length of time. They decided to immigrate to Africa and landed in Cape Town on the day Queen Victoria died in 1901. From there they went on to Lourenco Marques, where they settled on the island of Ketembe and he set up shop as a butcher. Rather than be a butcher in Lourenco Marques, Judah, his son worked as a shipping clerk for Miller Wheedon & Co and later for Cohen Goldman. Later Judah set up as a financier on his own.



On December 19th, 1915, at age 23 Judah married Mary Katz. They lived on Rua Princessa Patricia. They had 3 children. Isidore (Issy) born on September 22, 1916 and 13 years later a daughter Ray was born. But at the age of 3 1/2 she contracted Diphtheria. As medical services were not the best, she was taken to Johannesburg, but died there of heart failure. Mary never got over her loss. Freddy was born three years later on August 26, 1932. All were born in Lourenco Marques. Thus there was a gap of 16 years between the two brothers. Issy was the first boy to have his Bar Mitzvah in the Lourenco Marques Synagogue.



At the age of 7, Issy was sent to school in Johannesburg with all his cousins. They stayed at Colonel Levinson's boarding establishment and went to the Jewish Government School in Doornfontein. Later Issy went to Athlone Boys High. After matriculating he was articled to Abe Schwartz of the firm of accountants, Schwartz, Fine & Co.

In 1939, he volunteered to fight in World War II. Issy acquitted himself with great distinction in the Cipher Corp in the Abyssinian Campaign and was mentioned in dispatches and rose to the rank of Sergeant Major. He then went on to Egypt and took part in the desert war. He came home on compassionate leave in May 1942 and never went back up North, but was posted to Pretoria to train personnel in the Cipher Corp and later transferred to the training base, Tara (which later became a hospital) in Johannesburg, where he remained until his discharge.





The Barnett's moved to Johannesburg in 1939 and took up residence at 21 Abbotswold Road, Saxonwold. Unfortunately Judah died suddenly of a heart attack in December 27, 1941, age 49. Mary and Freddy were in Muizenberg in the Cape at the time. She then let the house and took an apartment in Sunningdale in Killarney. She lived there until her death on May 21, 1955 at the age of 57.



Mary and Lena Segal were great friends and card players. When Issy came home on leave from 'Up North' Mary decided to try and make a match between him and Lena's daughter, Joyce. The two of them hit it off immediately. Within six weeks they got engaged and were married on August 30, 1942 at the Wolmarans Street Synagogue.



As WWII was still in progress and there was every possibility of Issy being sent back to Egypt they also got a flat in Sunningdale, Killarney. Jeffrey and Alan were born while they lived there. In 1947 they built and moved to a new home on 8 Hume Road in Dunkeld where Derrick was born. They lived there until 1965 when they moved to a new house at 113 Fourth Road, Hyde Park.



As an anecdote about WW II; Joe, Judah's youngest sibling, who settled in Beira, a coastal town up north from Lourenco Marques received a citation from the Israeli government for having helped victims and survivors of the Holocaust during and after the war. He obtained visas for their entry into Portuguese East Africa and facilitated their arrival and settlement in the colony. He also arranged for those who wanted to, to relocate to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).

The Segal's

In 1885, on Yom Kippur in the small shtetle of Jonsikel (Janichzkel), in the Poneviz neighborhood, Lithuania, a son, one of ten children, was born to Reb Peretz and Chaia Sara (nee Sidler) Segal. He was named Abraham Simon, but was always known as Simon. His brothers and sisters were Ben-Zion, Herzl, Max, Seftel, Solomon, Chana, Elka and Tikva. His younger sister, Batya died at a young age. He was a very bright child and at the age of 15 had already obtained "Smichos". Due to the



threat of military service in the Russian Army, it was decided that he, together with his younger cousin, Alf Segal, son of Eli & Gisle Segal, should emigrate to South Africa as Eli Segal was already there. He had set up shop as a tailor in Hopetown, a small town on the banks of the Orange River near Kimberley. This was where the first diamond in South Africa was found. Peretz & Chaia Sara and Eli & Gisle were two brothers married to two sisters. Before he left Lithuania, Simon's mother insisted he learn a trade in order to survive in a strange land. The only option open to him in that very devout family environment was to become a "Schochet". Thus in 1904, the boys left home. Upon arrival in London en route to South Africa, they found shelter in "The Shelter", a charitable staging post for most emigrants fleeing Eastern Europe at that time. The authorities there helped them with a passage (steerage) to South Africa and a bit of pocket money for the trip. They landed in Capetown with £5 each. Simon immediately sent £3 back home. Throughout his entire life he never failed with a monthly remittance back home to Lithuania and later to Palestine (Israel). He even left a clause in his will that

the remittance be continued until his parents' death. Alf went to his father in Hopetown but Simon remained in Capetown. Without a knowledge of either English or Afrikaans (the language of the whites in South Africa), it was extremely difficult for him to find employment. But through the "Landsleight Society" he obtained a position as personal "Schochet" to a family on a farm in the Calvinia district of the Northern Cape. Being a gentle soul he found the killing very difficult as it went against the grain to kill. As soon as he had a working knowledge of the languages he started looking around for some alternate employment. He noticed that the Africans brought sheepskins to sell to the farmers. A Jewish skin buyer came around regularly to buy skins. He suggested to Simon that he should start going around the countryside buying skins from the Africans and farmers and then reselling them. He had a few short lessons from the buyer to set him on his way. He had saved a little money and decided to buy a small cart and a donkey to try his luck at this venture. He did this quite successfully for a while, spending many a night, sleeping under the cart. Then came the time to move on. He eventually landed in Hopetown and decided to remain there. The hot dry climate suited him health wise as he developed a chest problem – probably asthma. He opened a small farm stall which gradually grew and became a flourishing general dealer's store – The Hopetown Trading Co. He amassed quite a considerable estate.

Every time he had some spare cash – enough for a sea passage, he brought out one of his brothers, one at a time. First Solomon, then Herzl, then Max. Solomon and Herzl remained with him in Hopetown. He taught them the skin trade and sent them out as buyers. They were not too successful at this. More often than not they paid more for the skin than they could recoup. Max was still a youngster and was sent to school in Kimberley. Simon had such high hopes for him but unfortunately he got involved in bad company, landed up in Johannesburg and died at a young age. Simon always tried to uplift his brothers



but never got anywhere with them as they did not possess his vision and energy. He rented a farm “Donegal” on the way to the Salt Pan and put Herzl there to run it. This project soon failed. At the same time he established a general dealer's store in Krankuil near the Orange River Station, which Herzl and Solomon tried to run, but failed. He then opened a second store – Segal Bros., in Hopetown for Solomon. This succeeded as he was there to supervise them. He secured a license to open a small provisions store on an alluvial diamond digging at Brakfontein. Herzl went to run this. We as children loved to go with Simon when he took the weekly provisions out there. This was usually on a Wednesday when we only had a half day at school. We had great fun there. The diggers always allowed us to sort for diamonds in the washed gravel. We still have a small uncut diamond which was given to pay off a debt at the store.

In 1922, Dad got a message that his parents and 6 siblings had arrived in Istanbul, having fled from the Russian Revolution. They wanted money for passage to South Africa. But this was just when he had gone insolvent. He managed to scrape together enough funds to send them to Palestine, where they settled in Tel Aviv. When he was in a position in 1926 to bring them to South Africa, they refused to come. That is how they came to be in Israel. They did however never stop making requests for money for one thing or another. In 1936, when I matriculated, Dad and I had passages booked to visit the family in Israel. We were all set to go when the Arab Riots broke out in Jaffa and Tel Aviv and



his mother called us not to come. Like fools we listened to her and Dad never saw his family again. In the late 30's, Herzl went to Palestine to visit his mother and remained there. He later married a war refugee and they had twins – a boy and a girl – Eda and Baruch. Also late in life Solomon married Lily Giles from Petrusville – a neighboring town. They had one daughter – Cynthia. Lily died young and when her sister tired of looking after Cynthia, it was left to me to rear her.

Hopetown: 1919 – 1939

On March 31st, 1919, Simon married Lena Rabinowitz from Johannesburg. By this time his business had flourished and he was a very comfortable man. He told Lena that they would only live in the country for 3 years until he wound up all his affairs. The 3 years stretched to 20 years. Hopetown at that time was a flourishing cattle/sheep farming area. The farmers were prosperous as wool and hide prices were high after the war and business was good. Also there was a very substantial Jewish community. They all enjoyed a happy active social life together. Lena learned to play cards, tennis, piano and painting, amongst other graces.



Before he got married Dad loved to play Poker and Solo (similar to Bridge). There was a regular game at the local club. They never paid up at the end of the game. The barman kept a ledger and at the end of the year they settled their debts. Once he got married he stopped playing as he did not relish the idea of staying out until all hours of the night.

As Lena came from such an orthodox family, she naturally insisted on keeping a kosher home. Thus they had kosher meat and also fish sent by train from Kimberley. The fish was fine as it was packed in an ice filled Hessian bag. But invariably the meat went bad by the time it reached Hopetown. As this waste upset Lena, Simon rationalized as follows: they would buy the “traife” meat from the local butcher, but only the kosher cuts. It was then Kashered and treated as kosher. Except for this lapse, she kept a strictly kosher home and we as children were taught all the rudiments of “Yiddishkeit”. Later when we were at school we always observed all Jewish holidays and stayed at home on those days.

For the High Holy Holidays, Simon always organized a minyan for the Jews from the neighboring towns. He arranged a Chazzan to conduct the services which were held in one of the lounges of the one and only local hotel, owned by the Mofsowitz family. The Ark with the Torah, shofar, etc. was stored in our parlor during the year and then transferred to the hotel for Yomtov services. I wonder what happened to it after we left Hopetown. Simon was the chief organizer and shofar blower. Lena always had a “Brochah” after shul and everyone came to us for the breaking of the fast. We used to go to the river on Rosh Hashanah for Tashlich. Before Yom Kippur we used to “Schlagg Kaparoth” with a chicken, which was waved over our heads and then slaughtered.

In his wisdom he decided that Sybil, I and Barney Mofsowitz needed to learn Hebrew. He engaged as a teacher, the 18 year old son of Rabbi Rudi from Kimberley. He did not last too long as we made his life a misery. One day we tied up the legs of three chickens and put them on the chairs in our places. Another time we balanced a bucket of water on the door and drenched the poor fellow as he walked in. He told my father that he had never come across such “wilde chaias” in his life. That put paid to our Hebrew education!

We never had electricity until 1929. We used candles and paraffin lamps in the house and cooked and baked on a beautiful coal stove. I can still remember and almost smell the aroma of freshly baked bread cooling on the side of the stove, when we came home from school on cold winter days, and the taste of the bread smothered in butter and golden syrup.

At one stage we had 3 Annie’s working at the house. There was old Annie – the cook. New Annie – the housemaid. And White Annie – the housekeeper. We needed this help as Ma was in the shop all day. The only cooking she did was the few Jewish dishes she made and also the baking at which she was very good. Later we had a colored lady – Margaret – who came as a cook, when old Annie retired. I’ll always remember the wonderful fruit cakes she made and sent to me at boarding school. She came with the family when they moved to Johannesburg, but did not stay long as she found it too lonely without her family.

There was a Mrs. Ellen Julius, a colored lady, who was the town's baker. Ma used to give her the butter, fruit and sugar and she canned the fruit at 3 pence a bottle. She made the most delicious Koeksusters every Saturday. Her son would go around the town with a white linen lined baskets and sell them. There were also women in the town and on the farms who would crochet lace at 6 pence per yard with your cotton. Also women who darned socks at 1 penny a pair.

We did not have refrigeration, so we built a “cooler” outside. This was a structure of two “Walls” of chicken wire filled with charcoal. On the top there was piping with holes in it. The water would drip down, and the moist charcoal was cooled by the wind and would create a chill that kept the interior cool all the time. This was a very effective form of refrigeration. Ours was a very grand affair with a concrete floor and shelving all around. I remember the bottles of canned fruit and homemade ginger beer that were stored there.

In 1929 a great event took place – we were supplied with electricity! The pump station was down at the river. A swing bridge connected the pump station to the bank and it was great fun to stand on this bridge. One year, after a prolonged drought, the river came down in full flood. This was a most awesome sight. It was like a great wall of water gushing down and carrying all that was in its path with it. The noise was deafening and terrifying.

To amuse ourselves we played cricket on the main street using the pillars of the hotel veranda as wickets and a bat made of wood from a tomato box and tennis ball. The streets were not paved on each side. There were water furrows to act as drainage. We used to love walking and splashing in these when they were full of water, especially after a rainstorm. We were not allowed to walk barefooted before the rains came as it was believed that there were too many germs around before the rain washed them away.

The house was a large sprawling affair with a beautiful stoop(patio) in front and a huge yard and garden at the back. It also had a large barn and many store rooms. As it was very hot in the summer we always slept outside. We had a small enclosed area of the yard, where we had our beds.

But often we had to move inside when it rained during the night. So it was decided to move to the front stoop which was under cover and had roll up blinds to keep the rain out. This “bedroom” was right on the main street but it never bothered anyone at all. We were often woken up at night by travelers wanting petrol(gas) for their cars as the garage was right across from our house. There was also a large aviary where Simon bred pigeons. He loved those birds. We kept chicken and ducks and grew all of our own vegetables and flowers. Dividing the garden was a long grape arbor. We had a variety of fruit trees and a magnificent mulberry tree, which we loved to climb. Also fig trees. When the figs came into season, there was always a large bowl of peeled figs for us when we came home from school for breakfast in the summer.

Because of the heat, we started school at 7am, came home for breakfast at 8:15am and returned at 9am and finished at 1:30pm. If perchance it was raining when school ended, Ma would send the car for us but we always refused the ride, preferring, to walk, and get wet like all the kids whose parents never possessed cars.

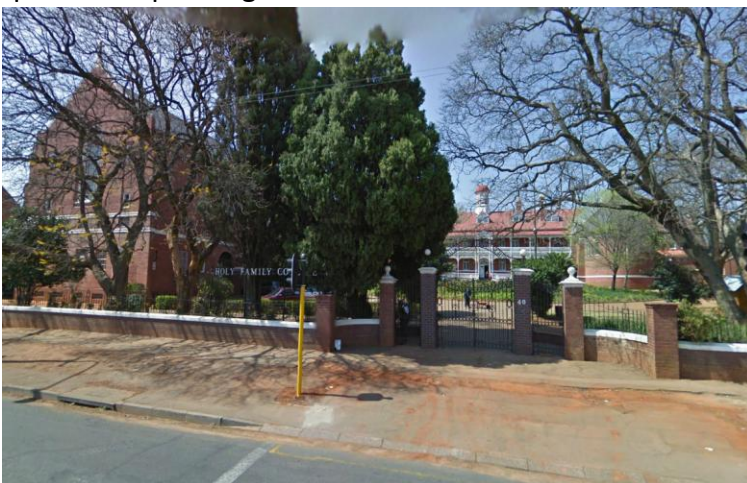


Our activities included tennis and music lessons with the church organist. We also joined the local Girl Guide Brownie Movement and had great fun there. That is where I learned needlework. There was a very well stocked Carnegie library, which served as the local cinema – indoors in winter – outdoors in the adjoining garden in summer. On the outskirts of the town there was a long “Donga” where we used to go to follow the spoor of Tortoises and often encountered more than we bargained for. We would often come across any number of snakes.

Our home and store were always repositories for the several relations – mostly cousins – who were brought out from the old country. First in 1927/29, there was Grisha Davidoff, Ma's cousin. He was a qualified engineer but because of his lack of English was unable to practice his trade. He was highly intelligent and cultured and soon had a working knowledge of English and Afrikaans. After a while he brought out his brother, Idel. He too was accommodated in Hopetown, but died at 27 of a heart attack soon after he arrived. Next came Hymie Rabinowitz. He was quite young and a little retarded. His greatest delight was riding a bicycle on the flat roof of the house. As he could not adjust to life in Hopetown, he was sent back to his brother, Eddie in Johannesburg.

When the wireless (radio) first came out, we had a beautiful crystal set. The reception was not the greatest. But at 1:15pm everyday no one was allowed to talk as the stock market prices were broadcast. This was most important as both Dad and Grisha were keen punters. If we spoke or made a noise, he would admonish us with "shah shah" which soon became a byword in the family. Grisha's main interest was P.P. Rust as he had great faith in platinum. He later moved to Johannesburg where he established a successful little café near the stock exchange.

The bathroom at the house had its own little wood fire geyser that generated hot water. Also there was a large cupboard filled with beautiful dolls of all description – porcelain sleeping dolls, cellulaide kwepies in all sizes, raggedy Anne's, gollywogs, teddy bears, etc. These were given to us by our uncles and some of the travelers who came around to sell goods for the stores. When we moved to Johannesburg, Ma gave all these dolls away, not realizing what a treasure she had there. The same applied to all the furniture and nick-nacks in the house. I'm sure we had some Baines and Bowler prints and paintings!



In 1935, I was sent to Johannesburg to further my education. I went as a boarder to Parktown Convent and spent the first 6 months crying myself to sleep as I was so unhappy there. But I soon got used to it all and loved it in the end. Not only

were my educational needs met but I also learned all the social graces – elocution, music, ballroom dancing, fencing, hockey, swimming, tennis, etc.

In 1934, Sybil was sent to Jeppe High and stayed with Auntie Janie as the whole family was about to move. As Mervyn had to get instruction for his bar mitzvah, Dad decided it was time for the whole family to relocate to Johannesburg in 1939.



Holidays

We usually went to the coast for the December holidays, but Dad seldom came with us as this was the busiest time in the store. We went to Jeffreys Bay, Mossel Bay and once to Hermanus. But this was a real disaster and we fled from there to Muizenberg. We also went to Port Alfred with the Johannesburg relations as described elsewhere.

Ma's best friend was Freda Bernitz. She was a very lovely smart lady who came from Berlin. They had a small hotel and store at a small outpost – Witput – halfway between Hopetown and Kimberley. We often went out there on the weekends. She was a most accomplished cook and baker and made the best biltong(dried seasoned meat strips). Then they moved to De Aar and later bought a sheep farm in the Richmond District. They then retired to Capetown where we often visited them.

The Store

Our shop – Hopetown Trading Store – was one of the focal venues of commercial life in Hopetown. As Dad came there as a young man, he grew up with most of the farmers. They were his friends and never called him Mr. Segal, but always Simon. In fact he was held in such high esteem in the town and whole district that when he died suddenly in 1943 a special memorial service was held for him in the Dutch Reformed Church in Hopetown. The main political parties in the 20's and early 30's were the National Party – “Natte” – led by General Herzog and the S.A. Party – “Sappe” – led by General Smuts. Naturally Dad was a member of both parties. He would never allow any political discussions inside the shop. So he provided benches outside on the stoop where the respective opponent's could argue to their hearts' content and then come inside to do their shopping. Most farmers had open accounts with us and only settled up each year when they received their wool/skins check. This of course placed great hardship on Dad as he was their unofficial 'banker'. We naturally bought their wool clips and then sold it to Mosenthal Bros. in Port Elizabeth. In the barn at the house, the large wool bales were suspended from the rafters. As the wool was sorted and thrown into the various bales we would jump in and stump the wool down. This was really great fun! Unfortunately the worldwide depression of 1922 hit South Africa as well. There was a drastic slump in the wool market with the result that Simon was completely wiped out. In fact he received a check for 0.9 pence (less than \$0.10 today) from Mosenthal Bros. for a whole parcel of skins sent for sale there. Because of his very good and honorable name the merchants he had dealt with before the crash extended credit and facilities to him to enable him to make a fresh beginning, which he did with success until he eventually moved to Johannesburg in 1939.

Besides buying wool and skins from the farmers, we also bought butter and eggs. But we would only purchase the butter from a very few selected farmers.

The shop was a hive of activity – untidy and crammed to the rafters with goods of all sorts. In the center were stacks of buckets, spades, saddles, etc. One could hardly move, especially at busy times

like “Nachmal” (The Lord’s Supper), a special celebration in the Dutch Reformed Church. This was a really busy time when the town was buzzing with activity. All the farmers and their families would come to town and stay in their houses they owned in the town, the one hotel, hostels, or even camp out and sleep in their wagons. We as children were roped in to help serve behind the counters. It really was a very exciting time for us.

Our parents were very warm and sincere people who treated all the customers big and small, black and white, with the utmost respect and dignity. Yet some amusing incidents occurred from time to time. Once, Nachmal, a customer wanted a new hat – but only the best. Dad showed him one at £1 but this was deemed too cheap. So he went through the whole range and was not satisfied. Eventually Dad showed him the original hat in a different shade and charged him £5. This was just the thing and he bought it. When he wanted to know the maker’s name for future reference he was told it was the 'Revach' (meaning profit in Yiddish) hat. This became a standing joke in the family. Another time Ma was trying a sale pitch with a new line of drinking glasses – supposedly unbreakable. To demonstrate this claim she threw one onto the floor, where it shattered into a million pieces. Needless to say the sale was off. To show what a clever business woman she was, here is another story. A new customer came in, went up to the saleslady and bought a reel of cotton thread. As she was walking out, Ma introduced herself and learned that they were new to the town and had just bought a farm in the district. Ma welcomed her and ended up selling her a whole household of goods. They subsequently became good friends and both she and her husband were one of our biggest customers.

One day whilst serving a customer with nails, Ma put her hand into the box which was on a high shelf and pulled out a snake together with the nails. You can just imagine her fright. Snakes were often encountered in the shop. They found that there was a nest in a wall. They were flushed out and killed by burning sulfur powder in the entrance to the nest.

We had a colored driver, Henry, a really fine guy. He taught us all how to drive. He had strict instructions from Dad that not only were we to learn driving but that we also were to acquire a working knowledge about the engine and most importantly, how to change a flat tire. One day Henry

had to put oil in the engine before they left on a trip to the Pan. Unfortunately, in error he poured molasses into the engine instead of oil. Needless to say after a few miles the car seized up and that was the end of that vehicle.

Sometimes on Sundays we would go out to visit some farmers close to Hopetown. One particular family was the Van Ecks. Mrs. Van Eck was a wonderful lady. She grew strawberries – a real treat in those days and served them to us with thick farm cream. In winter, she made us shaved biltong sandwiches.

There was a family Lomnitz in Hopetown. They were German Jews who converted to Christianity. They too had a large store. When the first diamond was discovered in the Orange River near Hopetown, it was brought into their store for verification. Lomnitz held the belief that if it could cut a piece of glass it was genuine. They duly tested it on one of the shop windows and a cut was produced. I believe that window is still there today. Incidentally, Mrs. Lomnitz was the one who taught me embroidery for a Girl Guide badge. She had a table cloth on which she got all the dignitaries who visited Hopetown to sign their autograph. Then she would embroider them. I wonder what happened to it. Once Mr. Lomnitz could not remember which farmer had bought a saddle during Nachmal. He told the bookkeeper to charge it out to everyone thinking he would find the right customer this way. But much to his surprise everyone paid for the saddle.

At some stage Dad acquired a Bottle Store License. The store was adjacent to the Shop. There was a great demand for cheap wine amongst the Coloreds and the Africans. The Coloreds were allowed 2 bottles of wine a week but no Brandy and the Africans were not allowed any. Hence there was a big black market trade in the wine. We used to buy the wine in big barrels. Our greatest treat was to be allowed to tap and label the wine from the barrel into the bottles. Great fights went on as to whose turn it was to bottle or to label.

Although we stocked sweets, we, his kids always wanted to buy the same sweets from the only Indian Family – Naik – who ran a sort of vegetable store cum café. This really did infuriate Dad.

In 1936, Dad took in a manager for the shop as he had then decided to move to Johannesburg. He gave Jannie Coetzee the position with an option to buy into the store at a later time.

We eventually moved to Johannesburg early in 1939. Dad purchased a home, on two lots, with a clay tennis court at 43 Bristol Road, Saxonwold. We each lived there till we got married, except for Sybil, who with her husband Sydney Lachman, stayed in the house after a major renovation to accommodate themselves, their four children, Ma and Mervyn who only got married late in life in 1960. Unfortunately the tennis court had to go but they added a swimming pool. Ma, known as Granny Segal to all her grandchildren, lived with them till she died in 1982 at age 87. Dad had died in 1942 at age 57. Sydney lived in the house till he died in 2011.



Dad took offices in the New Kempsey Building, at the corner of Fox and Joubert Streets. This was in the heart of the auctioneering world. Dad would walk past the auctions and see what he could buy. He started buying material- Tobralco, German Print, Calico, etc. Gradually the spare office was full and then the garage at the house. He foresaw the war and when it did come ours was the only store with stocks of materials. When Dad died in 1943, Ma gave Jannie a half stake in the business. He really treated her with the utmost respect and honesty and eventually he bought her out.

After I matriculated in 1936 I went to the University of the Witwatersrand – ‘Wits’ and



graduated with a B.Com degree in 1939. I went to work for the accounting firm of Schwartz, Fine & Co. for a year. I left them to join my father in his offices at New Kempsey Building where I, together with our secretary – Ettye Weinberg ran the administration side of the business. Unfortunately three days after Jeffrey's birth my Father died of a heart attack on June 6, 1943. As Issy was in the army

and Mervyn at school, Sybil and I had to take charge of the business as Lena went completely to pieces. Fortunately, on one of his regular trips to Hope Town and the Pan Simon took Issy with him. He showed him everything there and told him all about his other affairs and involvements – who he was connected with, who owed him money, etc. This information stood us in good stead when trying to piece together his estate. Sybil and I did a good job of running the business. She went around to all the produce merchants in New Town to get orders for salt. I ran the office and did all the accounts. Later when Issy was demobilized he came into the firm and took over. Then when Mervyn qualified as an accountant he joined us and Sybil and I stepped down.

Salt Pan

Simon was a very farsighted and adventurous entrepreneur. In 1921, he decided that he would like to try his hand at cattle rearing. He rented a farm Vrolikhied(Stolzfontein) in the Douglas district in perpetuity (99 year lease) from a farmer named Van den Linde, whose wife was the daughter of another farmer, Wiid, who owned just about the whole district. All the doors in the Van den Linde farmhouse were double French doors as Mrs. Van den Linde was so large she could not get through a normal door! On the farm Vrolikheid, there was a small



salt pan which the farmer worked for his own and his neighbors' needs only. Simon saw the potential of this asset. This was the beginning of the firm African Salt Works.

The pans at Vrolikheid and later the adjoining pans at Kleinbegin were always run by managers – some successful and some not so. Among them there were the Theron's, van Eck's and Naude's. In 1929, Mr. Goodman, a bachelor, joined us at Vrolikheid. He had had his own salt works – Famous Salt Works – and had much experience, especially at making salt for table use. He started a milling plant and the fine salt was sold under the brand name of "Lion Salt". In the shed they built for his operation, Dad left one wall unfinished according to the Torah Teachings. Goodman remained at the pan until his accidental death. He was a very heavy drinker. One night he fell asleep with a candle burning and set his room on fire. He was overcome by smoke and was burnt to death. He was buried in Kimberley.

Dad also had a venture in a pan at "Redlands" in the Prieska district. Here the manager was a Mr. de Koker, whose favorite expression was "Ja-nee" (yes - no). As this pan was too far from Hopetown, it was not a viable proposition and was eventually sold.

Managers

Mr. Theron was a hard worker but had very little initiative. He sustained a bad leg injury and became addicted to Pethadine and eventually left. Izaak and Ruth van Eck took over from him. They were a really refined and intelligent couple. She was a great reader and he was a very gentle and kind



man who had a very good relationship with the workers. We had a very warm and sincere relationship with them and were most distressed when he suddenly died of a heart attack. Piet and Sanie Naude, the under-managers took over the reins and remained at the pan until it was sold. They were good, God-fearing, hard working folk, but not too bright. The wives of each Manager in turn ran the little provision store – Vrolikheid Store – which was set up for the benefit and convenience of the pan laborers and the neighboring farmers. There was a small mission church on the farm. Dad built and maintained a farm school for the workers' children next to the mission. Later we built a proper compound for the laborers next to the pan. The school was rebuilt there.

As children, especially when the Johannesburg family came to visit, we loved going to the pan. There we rode horses, climbed the huge dumps of salt and had a go at scraping the salt in the pans. Once on the way back from a trip to Kimberley, we had a most traumatic experience. It had been raining heavily for several days and the trip back home in our old Ford was quite hazardous. The Modder River was crossed by a causeway. On this particular day, due to the heavy rainfall, water was already flowing over the causeway. There were people standing on both sides of the river watching the cars coming. They waved that it was safe to cross. Henry, our driver, was nervous but Ma told him to go. We got to the middle of the river and the car stalled. We were stuck!!! The water started rising and was soon up to the running boards of the car. Imagine our panic and screams. Fortunately there was a transport driver with a team of mules on the opposite bank. He saw our plight and came in with his animals and towed us out of the river. Years later in 1984, when Mervyn and I went down to the flooded salt pan and we had to cross the raging Modder River once more, I could clearly recall that previous incident. But by this time a proper bridge had been built to ford the river.

We had 3 disastrous floods – all in February -1925, 1984 and 1988. The pans and the adjoining lands as far as the manager's house were completely under water. We had to bring boats to get around. The 1984 flood was the worst – it took two years for the pan to dry out. Mervyn and I went down to see the situation for ourselves. We got stuck there and had to be airlifted out by army helicopters, which had flown in tents for the laborers whose houses were flooded out.

Following the floods of 1988 Mervyn was able to get the pans at Vrolikheid partially back in

operation but the pans never became as productive as before the floods as the strength and quality of the Brine water that was pumped up into the pans to make the salt through evaporation had been diluted and weakened by the waters of the flood. He was never able to get Kleinbegin back in operation. He sold the pans in May 1996.

I visited the pans in July 2007 with Alan, Abigail and David and was so upset to see how run down the housing and entire pan and farm had become. The kraal was broke down and overgrown with vegetation. The windmills and dams, where Alan and the other children had swum when they went down to the farm on vacation, were gone. I don't know where the people living in Van Eck's house got water from. The only buildings sort of left standing was the housing for the laborers, the school and the store. According to the locals someone still ran the store for them so that they could purchase supplies and food. Where the pans had been one saw just white dust. All the mills, storage sheds and rails that had been used to transport the salt from the pans in the Cocopans pulled by the donkeys were gone. It almost seemed as if not a grain of salt had been produced by the new owners.



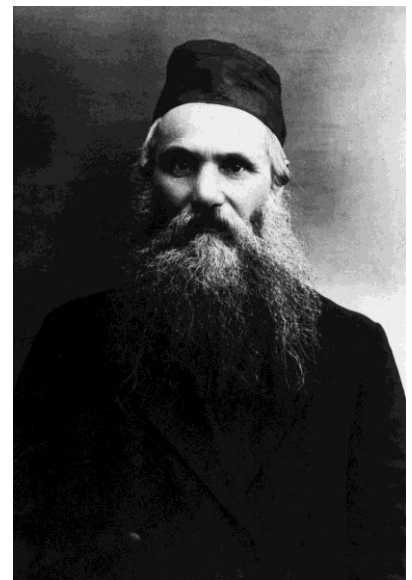
Farms

Dad started ranching cattle on Vrolikheid in 1921. This was the great love of his life and was later carried on by Issy and Mervyn on a larger scale. It also developed into a big and successful breeding operation when in 1949 we acquired a neighboring farm, “Saulspuit”, about 17 miles from Vrolikheid. We also went in for breeding German Merino Sheep with Ben Burger. These operations all carried on successfully until we sold the farms. In order to supervise all these operations, Issy and later Mervyn went down there at least once a month.



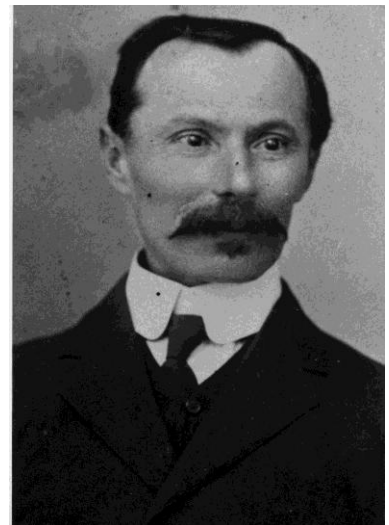
The Rabinowitz's

Our grandfather, Uri Simcha (1864-1917) was the son of the revered Rav Mordechai Rabinowitz – known as the Pasvilla Rav – a sage and renowned for his wisdom and learning. Uri Simcha, also a rabbi, married Sarah Rabinowitz (Schlapobersky) of Krakanova. They had two daughters, Janie and Lena born in 1894 and 1895 respectively.



Sarah's father, Edel had changed his original last name (Schlapobersky) to Rabinowitz in order to avoid military service. The family lived on the banks of a river where Edel, a man of substance, had a water mill where young Janie and Lena grew up. They made trips into the woods to gather berries; strawberries, blueberries and other varieties. In fact so vivid were Lena's memories of this that when she visited Germany with Izzy and myself in 1954, she insisted on going into a 'Wald' (forest) to collect berries. Also they always played near the mill. One day, the older family members went on a trip to nearby Poneviz and left the two girls at home. They were most put out by this and at Janie's instigation decided to attempt to stop the mill by applying the brake. Unfortunately, Janie's long dress got caught on the handle of the brake and she was dragged onto the mill wheel. Their screams brought the overseer running to their aid. He stopped the mill and got her off. All she suffered was a broken arm – badly set and always a little crooked.

Uri Simcha was not satisfied with his given profession and decided to join his brother in law, Beryl Asgor (Essie Lunz and Ed Rosenberg's grandfather) who was married to Sarah's sister Leah, who had already gone to South Africa. Uri Simcha left his wife and children with his father in law, and came to South Africa in 1894/95. Both he and Beryl were adventurous spirits. They took part in the Jamieson Raid in 1895 and fought for the Boers in the Boer War. They both later became traders. After the war, in 1902/03 they brought their families out from Krakanova and settled in Capetown.



They lived on Canterbury Street, around the corner from the Roland Street Jail. Here they had their third daughter Blanche and Beryl and Leah had their only daughter also named Blanche. Times were very bad for them in Capetown, so they moved to Johannesburg and settled at the corner of Walhuter and Market streets, in Ferreirastown, next door to the Elkins family. Although she was so very devout and orthodox, Granny Sarah sent Janie and Lena to the Ferreirastown Convent on Market Street as they had also attended a convent in Capetown. She realized that at that time this was where they would get the best education. No wonder the two always liked Christmas pudding and carols.

As opportunities were not much better in Johannesburg, Uri Simcha and Beryl moved to Lusaka, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), where they thought the grass was greener. They worked for a Mr. Goodman in his store and sent monies home to support the families. Uri Simcha died there in 1917 of Black Water Fever and was buried there. I, Mervyn and Martin Abrahams (one of Blanche's four children. The others were Cyril, Eunice and Naomi) with the assistance of Rabbi Silberhaft of the South African Board of Jewish Deputies were able to find his grave, which had been overgrown with vegetation and restored it in May 1998.



Life was hard as they were so very poor. In order to supplement their income, Sarah opened a small dairy on Betty Street in Jeppe. Janie and Lena ran the shop. They were very proud and upheld the very high moral standards in accordance with their beliefs and background. In fact Granny would not allow Janie to go out with Leopold Schneider as the last name, in Yiddish is a 'tailor', suggested his parents were tailors. However, he used to give Blanche a ride to school every day in his horse and cart. Janie always jokingly maintained they were so poor that they only had one pair of "going out" shoes between the two of them so they couldn't go out at the same time.

In 1910, Janie married Harry Schlapobersky and together with Granny Sarah, Lena and Blanche moved to Browning Street in Jeppe, where they lived in a semi-detached house. In 1914, just before Issy, Janie and Harry's second child, was born, they all moved once more. This time they moved to 'Eli Bank', corner Bloor and Park Streets in Belgravia, where the rental was £10 per month. This was where with the exception of Blanche's children we were all born. My mother, Lena would come up from Hopetown for the births and then at three weeks take us back home. Later Harry bought the house from the money he made at his company, Pacific Oil, located on Commissioner Street in Jeppe, where he traded in oil and other commodities. Janie and Harry would later move to Yeoville where they lived on Regent Street for the rest of their lives.



'Eli Bank' was a wonderful sprawling house with a lovely cellar and large garden and orchard of apricot, fig, peach and plum trees. In front of the main bedroom was a beautiful bed of hydrangeas which provided an excellent place for us kids to hide. In addition to the cellar, there were also two stalls where the former owner, Lord Elbank, kept his horses. The family, however, kept two cows as there was a commons just across the road where all the neighborhood cattle grazed. Every year – two weeks before Pesach – Granny would oversee Piet (the African helper) and his assistant scrubbing out the stalls from top to bottom. Then the cows were put back in the stalls and fed with fresh lucerne and potatoes, so the milk would be “Pesadich”. So much for the modern fad of kosher for Pesach milk! The weeks before Pesach were a beehive of activity both literally and figuratively, as Granny and Harry bottled and corked wine and brewed mead (a drink similar to beer but made with Hops) for Pesach. The sweetness of both attracted thousands of bees.

The neighbors across the road on Bloor Street were a family by the name of McDougal, with a brood of 10 children. Mrs. McDougal was the advisor on all matters of life, none more so than medical ailments. The two families became great friends.

My belief in “Ayin Harah”(Evil Eye) stems from the following incident. Granny and Janie went to visit a Mrs. Fanny Goldman, a friend of Granny’s together with Isabel and Issy (Janie’s oldest children: her other children were Archie, Esta and Ivan). Issy was a baby. When they got home, Issy took violently ill with a very high fever. Granny immediately went back by tram to Mrs. Goldman and accused her of giving Issy an “ayin harah”. A great argument took place but by the time Granny got back home Issy was fine and the fever was gone. Needless to say Mrs. Goldman and Granny never ever spoke to one another again!

In 1919, Lena met Simon Segal and they were married on March 31st of that year. They went to live in Hopetown. Every year Granny Sarah used to come from June to August to visit with us each year as the winter was not as cold in Hope Town as it was in Johannesburg. She was a little old lady and always sat at the window so as to get the sun



while reading her Yiddish books. On Saturday's she would daven at the same spot.

It was here that the Johannesburg relations, the Schlapobersky's and Abraham's always came for the July holidays and great time was had by all, as all the other Jewish families such as the Mofsowitz's and the Kaplan's, had visitors too. The Mofsowitz's hotel was full to the brim and the town was buzzing with all the visitors.

Likewise, it was always a great event when the Segal's came to visit in Johannesburg. A big fuss was always made of us and we were royally entertained. A big treat was to get all dressed up and take a tram ride into downtown Johannesburg to experience downtown life in the big city. All these reciprocal visits led to a great bonding between the cousins.

The family always went en masse to Port Alfred for the December holidays. In fact half of Belgravia relocated there. We from Hopetown would always meet the Johannesburg contingent at Nauwport Junction in the Cape. On our last trip in 1932, tragedy struck. Granny at the age of 65 had died suddenly of a heart attack in Johannesburg and we were all turned back to Johannesburg from Nauwport Junction. She was buried in Brixton cemetery. While in South Africa until I left in 2000 for Toronto, Canada, I always visited the grave with Issy Schlapobersky, who was the Mayor of Johannesburg in 1968/69, every year. When I get back there now, Issy and I still make our annual visit. I remember, we children were not allowed inside the shiva room and spent most of the day outside on the lawn.





