

SOME STORIES REVOLVING AROUND LILY (ROLLNICK) STEIN

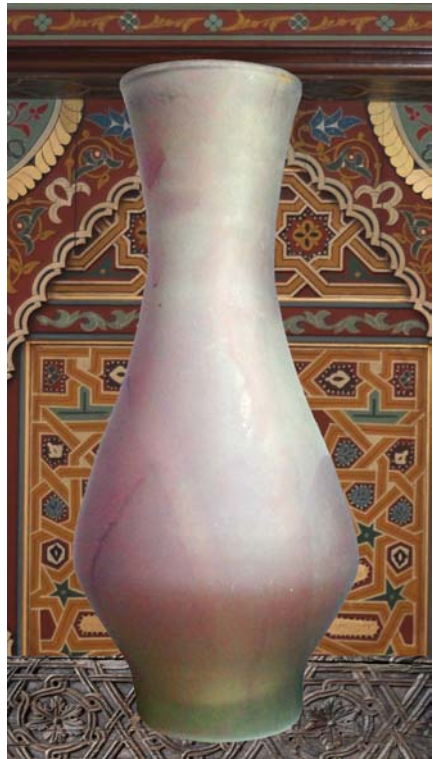
Grandma Lily's pearl necklace.

My mother Lily had very little jewellery but she did have a delicate pearl necklace. I wonder if Philip had given it to her? Now when we had already moved to Israel, and Philip and Lily were still living in London, our son Moshe took with him a little mauve vase from the gift shop Charlott on Coresh Street in Jerusalem (<http://ajewishisrael.com/culture/charlott-the-oldest-gift-shop-in-jerusalem/>).

Years later, we had already brought to Israel a few little things that Philip and Lily had left to us. Moshe recalls [I edit slightly]: "As to the pearl necklace. Actually it fell out when you and Mum were doing something with the vase soon before Dalia and I announced our intentions to get married. We had a recollection that it was Grandmas' intention to give the necklace to the first daughter in law." But we like to think that she deliberately chose Moshe's gift to hide it in.

The incident came to my mind recently while we were celebrating the marriage of Geut and his new bride, Elina.

At the celebration, Dalia was wearing that pearl necklace, bridging the generations.



Geut and Elina.

The refugees.

In the Rolnick book, page 371, I described how Lily had been so very active in helping the Jewish refugees from the 1930s Germany to settle in to their new lives in South Africa. There were a number of

families that we were particularly close with - the Ronsheims, the Eichelgruns, the Meidners and the Coblans family. I thought it might be interesting to write a little of their history prior to their coming to South Africa and what happened to them in later years.

Theo and Nan Ronsheim. Theo Ronsheim had been a lawyer in Germany and his wife Nan or Nanni, a painter. I remember his once telling me (I was a little boy at the time interested in chemistry) that he himself had wanted to be a chemist but that his professor had said to him "you have no nose. If you cannot smell the compounds you will not be a successful chemist". So Theo took to the law, and became a Doctor of Jurisprudence and a successful lawyer.

But with the rise of Hitler, a Jew could not be a lawyer in Germany and he and Nan came to Durban where they were met at the boat by Lily. Their twin sons, Stephen and Thomas, who were born on 26th November 1937 were about three years old at the time. They came to live in our house and I remember the two of them in a little crib, rocking this back-and-forth in the early morning. My father was at that time very active in the affairs of the Friends of the Hebrew University in South Africa, and Theo was found a place as the secretary of the organisation, making use of his lawyer's organisational skills. They moved to Johannesburg where the organisation's Head Office was and where they lived until Theo's death in 1966. The birthday of the two sons was the same date as my own and over the years I always received a birthday greeting from either Stephen or Thomas, or both. Another Lily story: Dr Ronsheim was a huge man, in both height and girth. One day, while the Ronsheims were still living with us, my mother handed me a pair of socks and said "These are Dr Ronsheim's. They have shrunk in the wash". I have never decided whether or not this was just one of Lily's jokes, but I am reminded of this every time I try to put on a sock in the morning and it feels a little too tight.

Nan came from a well - established family from Hanover in Germany. They lived in a fine house at 22 Richard-Wagner-Strasse.



How I know this, is that there is a "Stolperstein" in front of the house. These Stolpersteine (stumbling stones) have been put up in many cities in Germany and mark the houses of Jews who had lived there and were forced to leave with the coming of the Nazis.



<http://www.myheimat.de/hannover-linden-limmer/politik/stolpersteine-fuer-rudolf-und-lilly-herzberg-eltern-nanny-ronsheim-bernhard-herzberg-und-ruth-lang-kinder-m2679690,2524021.html>

It shows that Nanny's parents, Wolf and Lilly, had fled to Cuba in 1941 while Nanny and her brother Bernhard had left for South Africa in 1934 and 1933. Bernhard's twin sister Ruth had fled to Italy and died there from diphtheria. In South Africa, Bernhard became an anti-Apartheid activist. His obituary (written by Dennis Herstein who has written many obituaries of people who fought Apartheid in South Africa) one finds [I have edited this somewhat]:

Bernhard's father, a leather merchant and a doyen of Hanover's Jewish community, had won the Iron Cross in the first world war. When Hitler became chancellor in 1933, Bernhard pleaded with his father to emigrate, but was told that the holder of an Iron Cross would not be touched. The family broke up when Bernhard left for South Africa, one of the few countries still accepting Jews. The irony of moving from one racist society to another was quickly brought home. His ship was greeted in Cape Town by a local Nazi demonstration. "See," he joked to a fellow refugee, "they want us to feel at home." On the day in 1940 that Hitler occupied Paris, Bernhard joined the South African army. As an artilleryman with the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles, he fought in North Africa and Italy. The fate of his parents was different. His mother had not responded to Bernhard's letters until, after Krystalnacht in 1938 - a night of vicious attacks on the Jewish

community - his father was sent to Buchenwald concentration camp. He was released in 1941, when the Nazis allowed the couple to leave for Cuba via Lisbon in exchange for their home, cash, and possessions. After the war, Bernhard found his father shovelling coal in a New York boiler room. He brought the couple to Cape Town where they are buried.

After Theo Ronsheim died in 1936, Nan and the children stayed on through the war years in South Africa, but later left for the USA. Stephen and Thomas were apparently not able to cope with all these transitions. In New York, Stephen worked in sheltered employment with the Good Will corporation while Thomas held a job with a telephone company. My sister Zena felt that she had "inherited" the Ronsheims from Lily, and thus kept contact with them through the years until their death, soon after one another, early in the 2000s.

Nan was a very talented painter. Here are a few of her works that had been in Lily's possession:

The first is a painting of one of the twins, probably Stephen,



Next, a water colour of Lily's granddaughter, Ruth Susser. The scarf that Ruth has on her head was probably given to Lily by Nan. (All agree that the picture is not a good likeness of our dear Ruth).



And, finally, a picture of Nan herself by a contemporary artist.



Nan died in a retirement home in Kennett Square, Chester, Pennsylvania in 2000.

The Eichelgruns

This fine Meissen porcelain vase was given to Lily Stein by Selma and Reinhold Eichelgrun in recognition of the help that Lily gave to the Eichelgruns after they fled Nazi Germany and arrived in Durban, South Africa, in the late 1930's. Lily found initial accommodation for them and helped find them work. Later, the Eichelgruns rented a house not far from ours and we kept in close visiting touch with them as we did with others of those refugees.



Selma and Reinhold had married in 1908. I found their marriage record with the names of their parents. Selma was nee Hirsch. There are entries for Reinhold Eichelgrun in the Hamburg telephone directory from 1929 through until 1937 so they would have left soon after that date. Kristalnacht was 9-10 November 1938, but I do not have a record of when they reached South Africa.

They had three children who must have travelled with them. I remember one who joined the South African Army in the World War. As a little boy, I saw how worried people were about him. If he was taken prisoner, he was told, he should destroy his documents since the

Germans were said to be very hard on Jews who had fled Germany. Selma and Reinhold died in South Africa as did one son (at least). I found old burial records of many Eichelgruns in Tangermunde, near Berlin. An enquiry through the Geni.com website produced this answer: "I don't know much about this family. They are distant cousins of ours, from a branch that had moved to Tangermunde, near Berlin, and from there had spread all over the world. The origin of the family is from the village Beringhausen in the Sauerland, between Brilon and Marsberg. The family name was originally Eichengrun (with n), had slipped to Eichelgrun and later most of the family members near Beringhausen had changed their name back to Eichengrun, but the family in Tangermunde had kept the Eichelgrun spelling. All the best, Amikam Zur, Carmiel, Israel."

And what happened to the vase? Well, we were always scared to put it on display, since there were children and later grand children around who might endanger it. For a period, while we were still living in Manchester, it stood in what we called "the green room", which the family hardly ever used. Later we lent the vase to my cousin Frank Rifkin and his wife Iris who had a high shelf in their living room in nearby Salford where the vase could stand safely and be enjoyed by all. Then, for years, it lived packed up securely in a cupboard in our house in Jerusalem. Now it is still packed up securely, in a parcel ready to be taken by my daughter Rebecca to their house in Ardmore Pennsylvania, where they will find a safe place for it.

HANS MEIDNER, BOTANIST

The Guardian Saturday 22 December 2001 15.19

Hans Meidner, emeritus professor of biology at Stirling University, who has died aged 87, was imprisoned twice - "once by the communists," he used to say, "and once for being a communist". Towards the end of the second world war, while serving as a South African army engineer providing drinking water for allied troops near Athens, he was captured by communist partisans. In 1960, in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre, by which time he was a botany lecturer at the University of Natal and a leader of the South African Liberal party, he was detained for three months by the apartheid regime, though never charged.

Meidner was internationally respected for his work on stomata, the tiny holes in plant surfaces which open and close to regulate water movement and allow carbon dioxide to enter leaves for photosynthesis. He wrote more than 100 research papers and his books included

Physiology Of Stomata (with TA Mansfield, 1968) and Methods In Stomatal Research (with Jonathan Weyers, 1990).

He came from an almost extinct breed of scientist. He would often build his own research apparatus, bringing to the task his experience as a watch mender. Although he guided many students through research programmes, he enjoyed conducting experiments himself. He was a big person physically - affectionately nicknamed "Big H" - and it was amazing to watch him delicately piece things together with his very large hands. His entertaining lectures on plant physiology were a work of art; they would often include a demonstration of a particular law of science, and this, with his anecdotal asides, kept everyone's attention.

Born in Berlin, Meidner grew up in Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland), but his anti-Nazi activities forced him to flee in the mid-1930s, first to Ireland and then to South Africa.

in the Germany, Index of Jews Whose German
Nationality was Annulled by Nazi Regime,
1935-1944

Weidner

Surname: Weidner
Vorname: Hans
Geboren am 14. 1. 1914
in: Charlottenburg
Beruf: —
Lehler inländ. Wohnfö: Breslau, Markgrafenstr. 20

Der besagten Staatsangehörigkeit für wertlos erklärt durch Bekanntmachung vom 31. 1. 1940, veröffentlicht in der Nr. 15 des Deutschen Reichsanzeigers und Deutschen Staatsanzeigers vom 2. 2. 1940.

From 1942-45, he served in north Africa and Italy, as well as Greece. After the war, he studied botany and chemistry at Natal, served as president of the student representative council, and made his mark in the National Union of South African Students. He lectured in botany at Natal (1951-65), spending two study leaves in England, one (from 1954-55) at Imperial College, London, where he gained a second PhD

and the college diploma. He moved to Reading University in 1964 as lecturer and reader, and then to Stirling, as professor and head of the biology department, retiring in 1982. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1978. Meidner was also an expert gardener and an artist - his wartime paintings were shown at the Durban art gallery, and he made significant contributions to the cultural life of Stirling town as an influential member and officer of the Friends of the Smith Art Gallery and Museum. His enthusiasm for motorcycling meant that he was known as the professor on the big green Sunbeam. His last years were spent in Northampton, giving talks to University of the Third Age on the history of science, his philosophical viewpoint on it being influenced by Karl Popper. A strong supporter of CND and the Labour party, Meidner was, above all, a humanitarian who had the courage to speak out. He is survived by his wife Olga, son Anton, and daughter Hilary. · Hans Meidner, scientist, born January 14 1914; died September 11 2001

HERBERT COBLANS

Philip Stein made sure that the talents of Herbert Coblans were put to good use. In his autobiography, Philip writes:

“The end of the war brought a great influx of students to the college [Natal University College, Durban]. In 1939 I had one assistant. Before that, I had half an assistant. Coblans was my half- the rest of the time he did Chemistry with our engineers. I must boast of an achievement. When I was going to attend a Library Committee meeting, I learned from the Chairman that the college had an offer from the Carnegie Trust to pay for the training of a fully qualified librarian. It meant sending someone overseas. We had a young girl of moderate education and ability as our librarian and his idea was to choose her. Now I had been impressed with the interest Coblans had in general literature and in particular, in scientific literature, and I felt he was the man to send over, and not this girl. At the meeting, I got the committee to leave the appointment open. I waited to see if Coblans would be interested. He was - very much so. At the next committee meeting, he was duly nominated. He took over his duties immediately. The war was either already on or started soon afterwards, and he could not go overseas. After some time, he put in a year at the Cape Town library. He left for Europe after the war and became the librarian of UNESCO. He has now retired from that post and acts as a consulting librarian. I am proud of discovering a born science librarian.”

And then:

EDWARD CARTER, (1978) "HERBERT COBLANS:

A Biography", Journal of Documentation, Vol. 34 Iss: 4, pp.259 – 272

Herbert Coblans to whose memory this number of the *Journal of Documentation* is dedicated served for thirteen years as its editor and as a world wide spokesman of Aslib's cause. In character and intellectual make up he was an exemplar of Aslib itself: a highly professional exponent of the skills and techniques of recording and communication in, particularly, scientific fields. In this role he never allowed himself to be an extroverted propagandist but maintained his sometimes magisterial status as a highly attuned expert talking to experts. Thirty years ago he had been Head of the Chemistry Department in the University of Natal and it was certainly because of his scientific background that he was able to show to the scientific world a sense of the philosophies and techniques and sciences inherent in modern methods. What we are trying to show here, mainly in contributions from his professional colleagues, is more than just a record of his achievements at the summit of expertness in his profession but something of the social, cultural and moral character of a very remarkable man.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/eb026663>

<https://scholar.google.ca/citations?user=mPul-1MAAAAJ>