

## CHAPTER NINE: FROM RASEYN TO SOUTH AFRICA

### Ostrich Feathers from the Cape to London - Jews from Lithuania to South Africa

#### Part one: The Gurviches of Taurage

**T**hat all the Jews of South Africa came from Lithuania was a fact that we grew up with and, indeed, it is true that 70 to 80% of South Africa's Jews have their roots in Lithuania. A far smaller number came from Latvia (so we chuckled about Litvaks and Latviks), there were some from Poland and, after 1933, an influx from Germany. Of course, the original population came from England but we hardly knew any of these. As a child, I thought that the reverse statement was also true...that all the Lithuanian Jews had come to South Africa, but we have seen in the previous chapter that even for the Rolniks this was not the case. Far more Rolniks emigrated from Lithuania to the USA than to South Africa. So why did my grandfather, Wolf Rollnick, decide on Wynberg in the Cape Colony of South Africa rather than Chicago or Baltimore where most of his nephews had gone? In an earlier chapter, I argued that the heavy and early movement of Rolniks from the Raseiniai district to America would have been stimulated by the intense discussions amongst the Rolniks back home, following reports from their successful cousins in the New World. Was Wolf Rolnik not in on these discussions?

Perhaps, but I think that we have been neglecting the womenfolk. After all, women also discuss such issues amongst themselves and Wolf had married into a family of five daughters, many of whom were strong characters, who clearly had a good deal to say in family matters.

It is thus time to introduce these Gurvich women (later known as Hurwitzes) of Taurage, into whom my grandfather, Wolf Rollnick, married. The 1858 Lithuanian census lists the family of Ruvel and Sheyna Gurvich of Taurage (known in Yiddish as Tavrig), in the Raseiniai district as we see on the next page.

(Bear in mind that the Russian "G" substitutes for the English "H", so that Gurvich anglicized becomes Horvich or Hurwitz or other such).

This is another of those wonderful documents, here at 25 May 1858, which gives a whole household, just as one would wish<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://data.jewishgen.org/wconnect/wc.dll?jg~jgsearch~model2~\[newrl\]newrlg](http://data.jewishgen.org/wconnect/wc.dll?jg~jgsearch~model2~[newrl]newrlg)

Taurage Raseiniai Kaunas

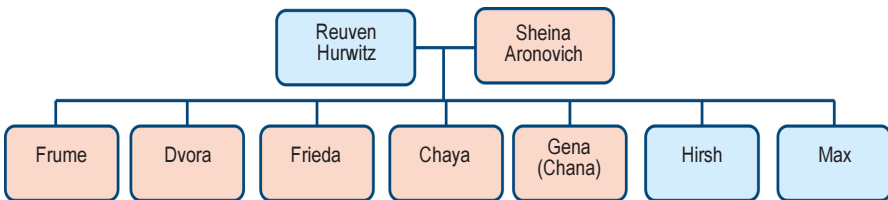
GURVICH	Ruvel	Vigder	Head of Household	38 (30 in 1850)	Petit Bourgeois	25
GURVICH	Sheyna		Wife	36	Petit Bourgeois	May
GURVICH	Fruma	Ruvel	Daughter	19	Petit Bourgeois	1858
GURVICH	Etka	Ruvel	Daughter	17	Petit Bourgeois	
GURVICH	Freyda	Ruvel	Daughter	13	Petit Bourgeois	
GURVICH	Chaya	Ruvel	Daughter	8	Petit Bourgeois	
GURVICH	Gena	Ruvel	Daughter	5	Petit Bourgeois	
GURVICH	Mordkhel	Abram	Cousin	32 (24 in 1850)	Petit Bourgeois	
GURVICH	Mera		Cousin's Wife	25	Mordkhel's wife	

So we see Ruvel /Reuben aged 38 (thus born 1820) and his wife Sheyna aged 36 (born 1822) with their five graceful (but dowry-needing) daughters, aged 5 through 19. The list shows that Ruvel had been living in Tavrig at least 8 years. On the list is Mordkhel. His father, Abram, would have been Ruvel’s uncle. Indeed, in the same 1858 census, an Abram son of Wolf is listed as having died in 1855, so it made sense for Mordkhel to come and live with his cousin Ruvel. In an 1834 census there is an Avigdor, son of Wolf (no surname), born in 1769, and this is likely to have been Ruvel’s father. We should hold on to the name Avigdor (Victor) since this will come up again later.

It was into this family that Wolf Rolnik married in about 1870, Chaya (or Johanna) being his future bride. I have no record of the date of their marriage, but their first child, Fanny, was born about 1872.

Three others of the Gurvich daughters married. The eldest, Frume, married Hershel Rifkin and they will play an important role in our story. Etke, also known as Dvora, married Joseph Millner of Siuliai (Shavil/Shavli). After she died, leaving four (or was it five?) children, Joseph came back to the Gurviches and married the youngest daughter, Gena/Chana.

**The Children of Reuven and Sheina Hurwitz of Taurage**



*Frume married Hirsh Rifkin and they founded the Rifkin line in Wynberg. Dvora married Joseph Millner. When she died, Joseph married her little sister Chana. Frieda stayed in Lithuania to look after their parents. Chaya married Wolf Rollnick. They and their children went to South Africa. Hirsch and Max went to Germany and some of their descendants went to South Africa and the USA.*

A daughter of Dvora and Joseph, Gita/Gertrude, married Elias Abrahams and the family went to South Africa and, later, some to the USA. Frieda Gurvich neither married nor immigrated but stayed in Taurage to be with her parents.<sup>2</sup> Dvora had two daughters, Gitta (Gertrude) and Lena. It is Gitta's fortunes we must now follow.



*Gitta Millner and her sister Lena Millner, in Shavil, Lithuania:*

But first, we go to her future husband, Elias Abrahams, born in 1844, in Zagare, in Northern Lithuania, close to the border with Latvia. (I am grateful to his granddaughter, Elise Josephson, nee Abrahams, who gave me the source material for this section).

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<sup>2</sup> Two Gurvich brothers, Moishe Leib (Max) and Hirsch, do not appear on the census list (one was not yet born). Both emigrated to Germany in the 1880's but kept contact with their sisters. Many of their descendants were murdered by the Nazis, although sons of both Hirsch and Max were able to escape. The family of Max's son, Richard, were helped to settle in South Africa by a granddaughter of Wolf Rollnick, who had met them in Berlin in the 1920's. Richard's son Harry studied Psychology at Witwatersrand University and at London University and later became a Professor at the University of Guelph in Canada.

<http://harryhurwitz.org/about-dr-hurwitz/>.

Elias was orphaned at a very young age, adopted by the Walkitsker family of Zagare<sup>3</sup>, studied at the local Cheder (Jewish day school), and, showing great promise as a student, was sent by the local community to study further in Vilna. He married Hannah Feinberg in 1865, and, after a son that did not survive, a daughter Sarah Bella was born in 1869. (The dates are important to the story!). Soon after, Elias left the two in Zagare, went to pursue medical studies in Berlin and Paris, and then went to England, with his family, where he now returned to his Hebraic studies,



*Elias Abrahams, circa 1890*

under Dr Nathan Marcus Adler, then the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire. In 1873, he took the family back to Zagare and he himself went to Cape Town, where he opened a general store in Uitenhage in the Cape. Diamonds had been discovered in Kimberley (soon to be incorporated into the Cape Colony) in 1869 and the Cape was beginning an economic expansion. Elias brought his family to South Africa, augmented by two more daughters. Here Elias made his beginnings in the ostrich feather business. Ostrich farming had begun to be developed in the 1860's, with the first ostrich egg incubator being patented in 1864<sup>4</sup>, and there were already Jewish feather buyers active in Eastern Cape in the mid-sixties.

Sadly, Elias's wife, Hannah died in 1884. Elias, with three young daughters to look after, decided to remarry and went back to Lithuania to find a bride. The Cape ostrich feather traders had strong connections with the Lithuanian shtetls of Kelme and Shavil, and in Shavil, Elias introduced himself to Joseph Millner, whose twenty-year old daughter Gitta (or as we will call her from now on Gerta) was deemed suitable.

3	Leyzer	Zagare	KRA/I-49/1/1381
VILKITSKER, Shaya	May	Siauliai	218
Candle Taxpayers	1846	Kaunas	971

<sup>4</sup>For a fine account of the Jewish role in the ostrich feather trade, see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, "Plumes", Yale UP, 2008

Gerta, a plain woman, “homely” and, still unmarried at 20, was not a catch, but she was prepared to marry a widower twenty years older than her, and, bravely, to be mother to the three children. Elias returned to South Africa having made the bargain with Joseph, which included Elias’s leaving a sum of money for a Torah scroll<sup>5</sup>. Elias went back to South Africa (taking with him a ram and a ewe of a strain of fat-tailed sheep that were the founders of this very popular breed in South Africa) and Gerta followed a few months later. They were married in Cape Town in March 1885 by Rev Bender (who officiated at my parent’s wedding 35 years later). Gerta was thus the first of the Gurvich family to get to South Africa, to be followed over the years by her aunts and their families, the Rifkins, Rifkills, Rollnicks, Millners, Silbermans and Wolpes.

Eventually, Gerta had seven children with Elias, and with the three from his previous marriage, Gerta and Elias brought up all ten of them. Nine, actually, since Hannah Millner’s eldest daughter, Sarah, had a difficult relationship with her step-mother, who was only four years older than her. Sarah left home early, married a Mr. Max Gluck and went to live in the town of Lady Grey. During the Boer War, between Britain and the Afrikaners of the Orange Free State and Transvaal, she became a heroine, “the postmistress of Lady Grey”.

Our Sarah, the intrepid, though formerly humble postmistress, Mrs. Sarah Gluck, faced off a large Boer commando that had descended upon the peaceful hamlet of Lady Grey. Undeterred, Sarah refused to hand over the keys of the little post office and placed herself in front of the flagstaff, denying any Boer soldier access to it. Apparently, out of a sense of chivalry, Mrs. Gluck was not manhandled and the Union Jack was left to flutter a while longer. This defiant gesture is the stuff that instant legends are made of and Sarah Gluck became a national heroine overnight. She is depicted in the postage stamp that follows,



<http://cyberstampclub.co.za/stampstories.htm>

<sup>5</sup> which is still with his descendants in Baltimore.

designed and printed in her honour a good number of years later.<sup>6</sup> She was still a postmistress when Elias went to visit her in Springs in the Transvaal in 1909.

It would appear then that it was Elias Abrahams' initial forays into the Cape Colony, already in the 1870's, which were discussed amongst the Gurvich sisters and led eventually to their relocation to the Cape.

In his autobiography (<https://sites.google.com/site/atlasrolnikmorgansternstein/>), my father, Philip Stein of Sveksna, not far from Taurage, posits another explanation, which is surely correct for the majority of the Jewish Lithuanians that came to South Africa. I quote: "Our going to South Africa is easily explained. Sammy Marks<sup>7</sup> was a Lithuanian Jew, born in Neustadt-Sugind or simply Neishtot, in the Raseiniai district. He came to South Africa and made good. He was a crony of President Kruger, had good government contacts, and became rich. There was a youth named Ansel, a poor relation of an uncle of mine, Barnet Millen. Hearing of the wealth of Sammy Marks, Ansel emigrated to South Africa in the 1880's. He did not become very rich but made a living. So my uncle and his wife, Mary, left for South Africa joining Ansel. ..In due course Barnet's brothers and my father followed. That

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<sup>6</sup> Mrs Sarah Glueck began her career in the Post Office as a postal assistant at Lady Grey, in the division of Aliwal North, in 1897, and by 1899 had been promoted to the position of its postmaster. On 14 November 1899, at the outset of the South African War, a small group of irregular Republican troops from the OFS, together with some local sympathizers, attempted to affix a Proclamation of Annexation to the Lady Grey post office notice board, and demanded its keys from its postmaster. Mrs Glueck not only refused to oblige, but replaced the proclamation with a notice of her own, reminding Cape citizens of their loyalty to the British Crown. On 19th November the Republican forces returned in greater numbers, and despite her vigorous protestations, they took over her offices. Following their withdrawal from the village in March 1900 the postal and communication infrastructure of the north-eastern districts of the Cape was only re-established with difficulty. Owing to a shortage of qualified personnel in this region the postmaster at Herschel was delegated to travel with the military to Barkly East to re-open its telegraph office. In his absence, his work was undertaken by Mrs Glueck and, for a time, she travelled the distance between Lady Grey and Barkly East on horseback on a daily basis, and served the postal and telegraphic needs of both communities. Her efforts did not go unnoticed, and in his report to Parliament for 1899 the Postmaster General singled her out for her work and made special mention of the manner in which she safeguarded official property during the course of the Republican invasion. Most importantly, the actions of Sarah Glueck at the start of the war seized the imagination of the public, and once the story reached the British press, her courage was given international coverage: poems were written about her, and pictures of her were sold in their thousands throughout the Empire.

<http://www.sahistory.org.za/franco/postal-history-women-colonial-po.html>

was in 1890.” Indeed, Sammy Marks’s success in the Boer Republics made an enormous impression on the Jews in the Raseiniai district from where he came. During those years, hundreds of Neishtot’s Jews emigrated to South Africa, England and America<sup>8</sup>.

It is interesting that both Elias Abrahams and Sammy Marks chose South Africa after an acquaintanceship with England, Elias having studied there for a number of years and Sammy having brought his horses to England (see footnote <sup>7</sup>) and remaining there for a time. Diamonds and ostriches were newsworthy topics in England at the time and caught the young men’s attention.

Elias was always keen on England although in the end he took Gerta and their family to the USA where he felt that his children could get a good but cheap education. Elias’s connection with the ostrich trade proved useful in the USA where he made a living as a manufacturer and trader in feathers, with his daughters helping in the factory. His specialty was his ability to tie a second barb to the first barb of an ostrich feather, giving the feather a gracious, luxurious appearance, in great demand at the time in the millinery business. He died just before the sudden slump and then near extinction of the ostrich feather trade, which peaked in 1912.

Some of his children stayed and made their homes in the USA, but some returned to South Africa and married there. The Abrahams children kept contact with each other and also contact with Millner descendants. Indeed, it was during one such contact that I first met

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<sup>7</sup> Sammy Marks: Born the son of a Jewish tailor in 1843/44 at Neustadt-Sugind (Zemaiciu Naumiestis), in Lithuania, Russia and endowed with integrity, courage, astonishing business acumen and immense vitality. Marks accompanied some horses to Sheffield in England while still a youth and not wanting to return to the Jewish persecution in Russia, decided to stay on. Hearing news of the diamond discoveries in Kimberley, he arrived at the Cape in 1869 and was shortly followed by his cousin Isaac Lewis, also from Neustadt-Sugind, with whom he forged the enduring partnership of *Lewis & Marks*. Marks started his career as a peddler in the rural districts of the Cape, but soon headed for Kimberley where his rise to prosperity began. They made a modest living supplying goods to mines and diggers, and later branched into diamond trading. Moving to Pretoria in 1881 he gained the confidence of President Kruger and the government of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR). His friendship with Kruger became close and enduring and they had, in common, humble origins and a ready wit.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sammy\\_Marks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sammy_Marks)

<sup>8</sup> Some Jews, after having lived for a few years in South Africa, returned to Neishtot bringing much money with them. In 1884 about 200 young men emigrated to South Africa, of whom 10 returned home to Neishtot, after becoming wealthy. In those years there were families in Neishtot whose only income was the money sent to them by their relatives from South-Africa.

with Elias's grand daughter Elise. I was travelling on an El Al plane from Tel Aviv to New York, when I overheard two young women, returning from a wedding, talking of their common family but with one having a South African accent and the other pure American. When I intervened and asked how could that be, it turned out that we were all three related and since then I have kept up the warm contact with Elise.

Although Sammy Marks's success probably pulled many Lithuanians to South Africa, while Elias's only partial success brought few Rollnicks other than us (although that itself was a goodly number, if one counts also the Rifkins and Millners), there is still another important cause of the flow to be considered. The shipping costs were subsidized by the flow of ostrich feathers in the opposite direction. Ostrich feathers had become a very important component of South Africa's export trade (fourth after gold, diamonds and wool) and this was a bulky cargo. In 1886, for instance, 90,000 bales of feathers were shipped from Port Elizabeth, each bale weighing 400 pounds.<sup>9</sup> One could fit quite a large number of immigrating Jews into the space so occupied (although it would be their luggage, but not the passengers themselves, which would be in the holds). Riva Krut adds an additional point: the ships that had been used to transport immigrants from Ireland to the USA were becoming available to carry other travelers as the flow from Ireland began to dry up. The shipping lines sent their drummers to Lithuania, among other places, to find passengers and were able to offer reduced fares.<sup>10</sup>

## Rifkins and Rollnicks settling in the Cape

We have seen that Gerta Millner (daughter of Dvora Etke, one of the Gurvich sisters, and hence niece of the others) was the first of their circle to relocate to the Cape. Victor Rifkin, son of Frume, another Gurvich sister, and hence nephew of the other Gurvich sisters, was the first to build up a permanent home in the Cape. But Victor drew even closer to the family by marrying his cousin, Fanny, eldest daughter of Wolf and Chaya Rollnick.<sup>11</sup> Victor (named after his great

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<sup>9</sup>The Statesman's Yearbook for 1891. [http://www.archive.org/stream/statesmansyearb04paxtgoog/statesmansyearb04paxtgoog\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/statesmansyearb04paxtgoog/statesmansyearb04paxtgoog_djvu.txt)

<sup>10</sup>Riva Krut, 'The Making of a South African Jewish Community in Johannesburg, 1886-1914' in Belinda Bozzoli (ed.) (1987) "Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives" (Johannesburg: Raven Press)

<sup>11</sup>For all this section, and much else, I am dependent on notes left by my mother, Lily nee Rollnick in various forms, and transcribed by different hands. Scans of two of these documents appear on pages 310-311.



grandfather Avigdor) arrived in the Cape in 1891, according to his naturalization papers.<sup>12</sup>

My mother's notes indicate that Victor and Fanny had married already in Lithuania. I have no information on Victor's early years in the Cape. Perhaps, as were so many of his fellow-immigrants (including my paternal grandfather, Solomon Stein), he was a peddler among the Boer families in the interior of the Cape Colony. In any event, Victor was a skilful business man, and by 1896 he was already sufficiently established to be able to take out a mortgage to the extent of 560 Pounds Sterling (some £100,000 in today's equivalent), enabling him to buy land, on which were situated three buildings, in Cape Town off Sir Lowry Road.

In the meantime, other members of the family, their brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles, had begun to follow Gerta and Victor. Our Wolf Rollnick, Chaya and six of their children (Fanny was already in the Cape) had arrived on the Spartan on 19th May 1894, travelling steerage.

I have had to interpret the relevant shipping manifest. All the passengers are listed with family name Horvitch, rather than Rollnick



*Wolf Rollnick, already in Wynberg?*



*Chaya Rollnick in Muizenberg, 1935*

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<sup>12</sup> For dates of immigration, I have had to rely on many different types of sources, since the shipping manifests into South Africa are so poor in coverage and quality. I have hardly found an appropriate manifest for our Rifkins and Rollnicks, other than those concerning Congo Joe, as discussed in an earlier chapter.

Offspring of Chaia (nee Hurwitz) & Wolf Rollnick  
(Chronological order)

Fanny b. 1872 d. 1920

RIFKIN

Victor Rifkin (son of Fannie Hurwitz (sister of Chaia) & Wolf Rollnick) 2nd  
(in Lithuania) m. Adena m. Lode Shapiro (Lode's wife) } 2 sons  
Ethel! b. 1896 m. H. Myers - Bridgeport, Frank. Religious m. Shida }  
Max m. Sarah - Boris m. June - Det. Moira o. Debbie m. Foster }  
Becky (Tommy) m. Spira - now lives in Canada.  
Fannie m. Isaac - Fannie, Peter.  
Rosie m. Myers - Linda (Shelma) Vancouver, Sheila, David.  
Shirley - unmarried etc. etc.  
Lily m. Lester Kerner, - Franklin (Canadian), Nina - (Israel)  
Hymie - d. N.Y. = 1975. wife.

Donna b. 1874  
d. 1966 w. Jacob

MATZ

Avon Matz Bondebsch (1906/1926)  
in Weidenbach m. Chimp Lewenson son of James m. Rosa (Coleman) son Robert b. 1920  
Celia b. 1900 m. Karon - no issue  
Boyjie m. Bekkie (Leopoldine) - Leon + Sunny - two children  
teacher  
Bessie m. Samba Brunnend - S. m. 1925 - 1928 - 1930 - 1931  
(Ethel) m. David  
Ben m. Lily - no issue  
Sheena m. Berne Smit  
Ray - Fannie Brunnend - Albert m. 2) m. work Boston  
Ruth m. net m. 1922 - Barbara - Yonah  
b. 1919 m. a French A. Hzi  
Shubs - Michael m. Jenny  
Stephanie b. 1935 London  
Kerry m. Graham Corbet - Victoria b. 1923  
Wendy b. 1937 - Yonder Geankte  
Shirley b. 1937 - m. Paul (Levi)  
Felicity m. Meyer Aronson  
Antonia b. 1942  
G. m. 1942  
Sue

Two pages from Lily's notes (probably transcribed by her daughter, Zena):

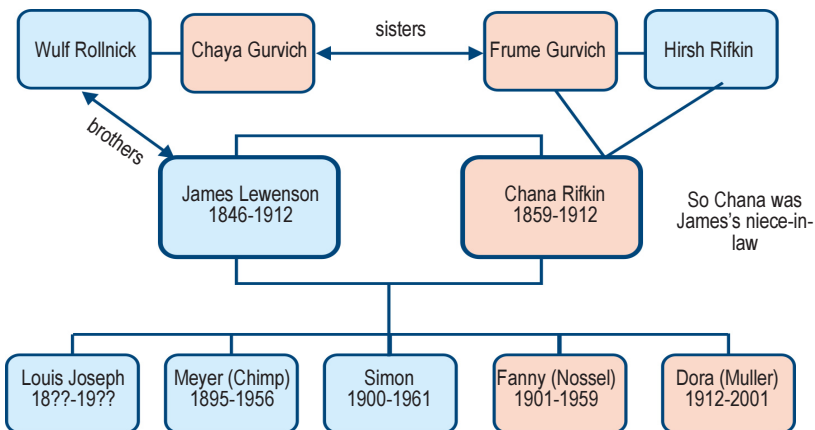


or Rolnik. Indeed, as footnote 12 records, other than Joseph Rolnik/Rollnick, no Rollnick is listed in the shipping manifests. Yet the ages of the “Horvitches” are correct for the parental Rollnicks and more or less correct for the children. As is so often the case with the records for arrival in South Africa, we have not been favoured with the full names or even initials of the parents. But the date fits oral history, and with Lily Rollnick’s being six months old when they arrived.

I have not yet mentioned another “Rollnick” who had come to the Cape at this time. This was Chaim (James) Lewenson and his wife Chana Rifkin. Lewenson? So in what way was he a Rollnick? In a very direct way! He was, indeed, a brother of Wolf Rollnick, and also therefore of Wolf’s siblings, Dov Ber, Meer, and Johanna, all children of Josel Rolnik of Upyna. We met three of them in previous chapters: Dov Ber as the father of the Chicago, Baltimore and Oklahoma Rolnicks, Meer as father of Congo Joe, and Johanna, mother of the Silbersteins.

Apparently to avoid conscription into the Tsarist Army (with the attendant 20 years of military service), Chaim/James had changed his surname, the new name perhaps reflecting that he was from the House of Leyba...Leyba’s son<sup>13</sup>. James was far older than his wife, Chana, who was a child of Herschel Rifkin and Frume (nee Gurvich), a sister of his sister-in-law, Chaya. Hence James had married his niece-in-law<sup>14</sup>.

### The Lewenson Family Tree



<sup>13</sup> The Yiddish “Leib” or “Leyba” means “lion”, often written as Leo or Loewen. So the son of (or from the house of) Leib can be Lewenson.

<sup>14</sup> Another complication: Chana Rifkin was a sibling of Victor Rifkin, who had married the Rollnick daughter, Fanny!

That in itself was not a problem as far as genetics is concerned. But we will see the genetic conundrum resulting from this marriage when we discuss James and Chana's son, Meyer, later in this chapter.

James started off in the Cape as a peddler, but soon set himself up, like the others, in a shop in Wynberg.

Where did the Rollnicks live in those early days? Fanny (nee Rollnick) and Victor, parents of the Rifkins, presumably had their own establishment by the time the rest of the Rollnicks arrived, but the Rollnick household had to accommodate the remaining children: Dora, Janie, Sarah, Abraham, Robert, Roman, and Lily. When he arrived, Joseph Rollnick (not yet "Congo") had to be accommodated as well. It was indeed a hospitable home.

A peddler from "up country", who had arrived in the Cape early in 1897, was invited to the home for the Shabbat meal. He started coming regularly and it became apparent that he was courting the second Rollnick daughter, Dora. The peddler was Aron Michael Matz and with the addition of this second son-in-law, who was as capable as Victor Rifkin, the Rollnicks were now well equipped to face the economic battles of life in the new country.



*Wynberg village on the hill prior to the introduction of a drainage system and the kerbing and guttering of streets.*

*Wynberg in the late nineteenth century.*

*Taken from: "Beyond the City Limits People and Property at Wynberg 1795-1927  
Helen Robinson, Juta and Co, Cape Town, 1998*

## Part Two: Rollnicks and Rifkins

Who chose Wynberg for the new shtetl? It was an excellent choice. Wynberg was then just beginning to expand from a sleepy village outside Cape Town to a thriving centre situated on a newly-extended rail line, and feeding an Army camp.

You must picture Wynberg at that time, as in the view above, with unmade or newly made streets, and no motor cars or buses. Building a tram line from Cape Town was still under discussion. Goods traffic was by ox-carts which often filled the congested town centre.

The population, just under 5,000 persons in 1891 was to rise almost three fold in the next decade. As an example of the Jewish traders who “from humble beginnings” established businesses in Wynberg, Helen Robinson<sup>15</sup> describes the “Rifkin (Rifkill) brothers who had arrived from Lithuania in the 1890’s and, after several years of itinerant trade,...set up shop in the Bay (later Main...wds) Road. By the end of the decade they had a second shop in Wynberg village and the Matz, Rosenberg, Oshry, Cohen and Mendelsohn families followed their example”. And I continue to quote: “Wynberg soon had one of the largest Jewish communities in the Southern Peninsula, numbering 743 by the 1890’s. By 1897 the number of Jewish residents had grown to an extent that justified (the planning of<sup>16</sup>...wds) the construction of a synagogue, which was consecrated by Rabbi Bender<sup>17</sup> of Cape Town.”

A complete rebuilding took place in 1919 (see photo next page) but, with the dwindling of the community, this second shul has now been demolished. The contemporary photos were taken by Ruth Susser King (Wolf and Chaya Rollnicks great-granddaughter) in 2007.

The Rollnicks, Rifkins, Rifkills, and Matzes were included in the founder members of the shul, with Aron Matz and Victor Rifkin often



*The 1904 Shul in Wynberg.*

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<sup>15</sup> For an excellent study of early and later Wynberg, Helen Robinson’s book “Beyond the City Limits: : People and Property at Wynberg, 1795-1927” Juta and Co, Ltd, 1998 is well worth consulting.

<sup>16</sup> Built only in 1904

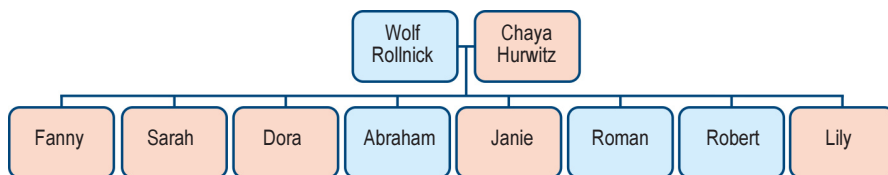
<sup>17</sup> (This is the same Rev. Bender who had married Elias Abrahams and Dvora Millner in 1885, and was to marry Lily Rollnick and Philip Stein in 1920).

alternating as Presidents, Aron still President again in the 1940's: as seen in the plaques just below:



The 1919 shul in 2007, slated for demolition. Some Sussers near the gate.

## The Children of Wolf and Chaya Rollnick of Wyberg



All the children originally lived in the Cape Town area. Fanny married Victor Rifkin and Sarah married Louis Levy. Dora married Aron Matz while Abraham married Annie Simonhof and Janie married Harry Cohen. Roman married Bertha Shagam. Robert married Florence Kahn, and Lily married Philip Stein. Their stories are told in this chapter.

### Financial ups and downs

In the 1897 issue of Jutá's Directory of Cape Town, and again in 1899, W. Rollnick is listed as a General Dealer on Broad Street, Wynberg, north of the station; V. Rifkin, ditto, on the Main Road, while A. Matz was also a General Dealer (address not given). So they were by then no longer peddlers, but had set up proper shops in the town. In 1901 all three are listed as general dealers, with Wolf having moved to Main Road, Wynberg.

Things were not, however, always smooth for the new immigrants. We saw above that Victor Rifkin had, in 1896, taken out a substantial mortgage to buy land and houses in Cape Town itself. He took out further mortgages almost every year for the next five years. His father-in-law, Wolf Rollnick, took out a large mortgage in 1897- £2,100<sup>18</sup> - to buy property, including several dwelling houses, in Woodstock, a poorer part of town with a working-class population. Aron Matz took out a mortgage in 1898 and then more in successive years. In 1902 Wolf, together with his son-in-law Victor, bought seven distinct properties in the Salt River area and elsewhere, on the strength of a mortgage for, this time, £1,100. Wolf and his sons-in-law were becoming substantial rentiers - almost all of the properties were rented out to monthly tenants who could not always come up with the money.

I quote now again from my father's autobiography (remember that this refers to the Stein family, but is in the same time frame as our Rollnick story) :

"There was a big property boom on in Cape Town due to the fact that the war was on (the Anglo-Boer War, 1899 – 1902,...wds). The

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<sup>18</sup> More than £200,000 in 2012 values.



British Government spent lots of gold sovereigns. Also the private British sector poured money into the country. The interest rate in Britain then was about 2 1/2%. In South Africa one could get 5% - 6% on first mortgage. My father had first kept out of this property boom but then it got him, or probably it got my mother. He sold half his interest in their farm to Harry Shore who was courting my sister, Minnie, and in partnership with a man, Katz, ... bought a big property with a big mortgage in Salt River. My sisters used to point it out to me in later years when we passed it travelling by car. It was to provide us with an income for life. When the boom turned into a slump and the war ended and the Transvaal and Orange Free State refugees returned home, no rents could be had from this property and we had no resources wherewith to pay the interest on the mortgage. We were truly and really bankrupt."

In parallel, Wolf Rollnick and Aron Matz, together, were the defendants in January 1905, in a case brought by David Pieter de Villiers Graaff for the sum owing to him on a mortgage of £5,000 (almost half a million pounds today) in connection with the purchase of no less than 16 pieces of land and buildings in Hanover Street, Cape Town and its surroundings. The mortgager was the famous de Villiers Graaff<sup>19</sup>, formerly Mayor of Cape Town and later to be Minister of Finance in the Union of South Africa's government. Against this formidable opponent, Wolf Rollnick, just ten years off the boat from Lithuania, defended himself in person. In the eventual judgment, the mortgaged properties reverted to de Villiers Graaff as mortgage holder

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<sup>19</sup> From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Sir David Pieter de Villiers Graaff, 1st Baronet** (30 March 1859 – 13 April 1931) was a South African cold storage magnate and politician. Graaff revolutionized the cold storage industry in Africa. He founded the Imperial Cold Storage and Supply Company in 1899, and aggressively ran it until he left to serve in government. Graaff grew the company into one of the largest in Africa. Graaff's wealth soared, at the turn of the century. During World War I he personally part financed the South African war effort and for this he was knighted as well as for services at the Paris Peace Conference 1919. He was known as "The Octopus" as he had a hand in so many businesses. During the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), Graaff obtained lucrative contracts to supply the British Army in the field, but he also made substantial donations towards alleviating the suffering of Boer prisoners of war, and providing medical supplies to Boer women and children held in British Army concentration camps.

When the meat market slumped after the war, Graaff invested in property in and around Cape Town. A close friend and confidant of Gen Louis Botha, the first prime minister of the Union of South Africa, he was created a baronet in 1911 and served as Minister of Public Works and of Posts and Telegraphs (1911–1912), Minister without Portfolio (1912–1913), and Minister of Finance (1915–1916).

but Wolf did not yet have to declare insolvency. However, the family's troubles were not yet over. W. Rollnick jointly with V. Rifkin declared insolvency in March 1908. The list of properties that they still owned at that time is extensive: three houses in Dove St, three in Arnold St., and another four in Bishop St., Woodstock, and also four houses in Stanley Rd, Salt River. The rentees, names such as Pienaar, Jacobs, Petersen, Thiebert, Roest, Abas, Vilbret, and Gaffer<sup>20</sup>, each paid a monthly rental of three or four pounds, sometimes in dribs and drabs, but apparently when repairs and commissions were taken into account, this was not enough to pay the mortgage interests, still running at 6%, and even 7% on one mortgage bond. Later, in 1912, Aron Matz also had to declare insolvency, but all the family eventually recovered.

In her fascinating account of the Jewish shopkeepers of the town of Jamestown in Pennsylvania, describing events happening at much the same time, the urban sociologist Eva Morawska<sup>21</sup> points out that such cycles of solvency and insolvency are common features of the economic life of small traders. Fashions change, business slumps occur, with unemployment reducing demand for the trader's goods. But business picks up again, new opportunities arise and life progresses. So it was for the Rollnicks, Rifkins, and Matzes in Wynberg.

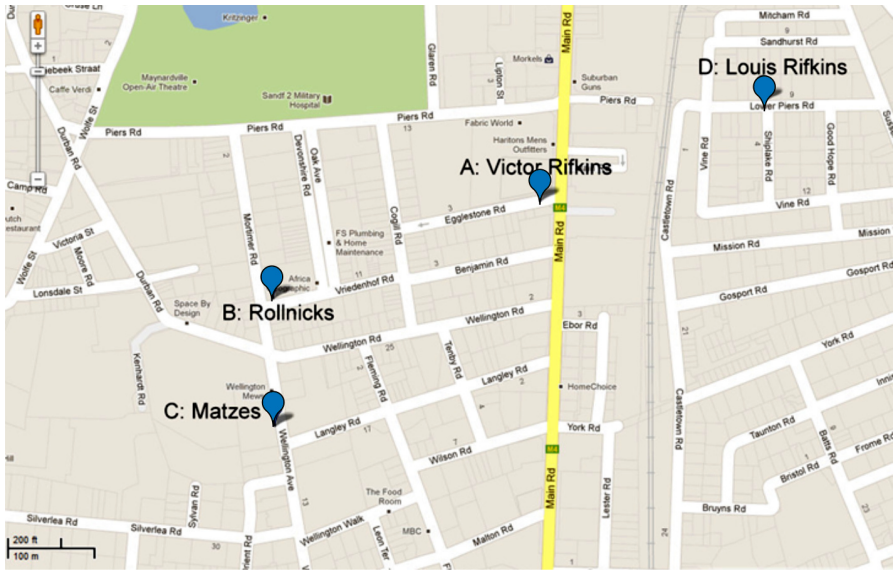
By 1905 Victor had been joined by his brother Louis who also opened a general dealership on the Main Road, and Victor had bought the house at number 5 Eggleston Rd (A, see map on facing page). Soon after, the Wolf Rollnicks were living in the house Avondale on Vriedenhof Road (B), the Matzes had moved into Wellington Avenue (C) and Louis Rifkin was living in Lower Piers Rd (D), all within a few hundred metres of one another, if one used the foot bridge over the railway line. Their shops were close by on the Main Road. By 1919, Dora was running a grocery on the Main Road in addition to Aron's general dealership in Dieprivier, in nearby Plumstead; Victor's shop was styled a Boot Emporium and he had a Men's Outfitting on Wolffe Road.

I don't think, however, that Wolf himself, a generation older than his sons-in-law, really retained his enthusiasm for the business world. I find no record of his having continued with the General Dealership on Broad Street. But in 1913, we see Rollnick & Son, produce dealers, Landsdowne Road, in nearby Claremont. Who was the "& son" I wonder? The eldest, Abraham, was at that time running a movie house

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<sup>20</sup> The names could suggest perhaps people of mixed race and, in that district, certainly working-class in status.

<sup>21</sup> Eva Morawska, "Insecure Prosperity", Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1996.



*The Rollnick family house, 'Avondale', Vriedenhof Road, Wynberg, 2007.  
(photo by Ruth Susser King)*

in Simonstown, as we shall see. The youngest was on his way to the UK. Was it then Roman? Was it now or had it been earlier that the Rollnicks kept a cow or two behind the house? (see the photograph on page 352, taken inside the house).

Wolf's great grandson Stephen Rollnick remembers his father telling him that Wolf "had a cow in the back garden in Wynberg, and he said to his son, Roman, that if he sold the milk he could keep the money, and this launched the young man." A granddaughter, Zena Stein Susser, recalls a story about a cow (maybe the same cow?) that ate something that it shouldn't have, blew up and died. Her brother

Sylvester adds "I remember visiting Grandpa Rollnick in the last year of his life (1927) when our family paid its annual Xmas visit to the Cape from Durban....There old Grandpa was, sitting on the stoep of the little terrace house in Wynberg, hands on knees, pondering over his long life. Of course neither he nor my two Grandmas could manage much English, so we never did much chatting."

In the Death Notice attached to his will, Wolf is described as a "Landed Proprietor", 78 years old.<sup>22</sup> He left £1,420, all to his wife Chaya. In present, 2011, currency (comparing with average earnings), this would be about £200,000, a goodly sum. Most of the money was in the Standard Bank, but it included a loan of £330 to his son Abraham.

And on Chaya Rollnick: In her widowhood, Sylvester writes about his "more frequent visits to old Bobba Rollnick. She lived under the wing of Auntie Janie in a little cabin in the garden of the Cohen corner house on Cromer Rd (Muizenberg...wds). She cooked her meals her own special way and generally kept to herself. Wearing a wig and hardly a tooth in her jaw."

The picture of Chaya Rollnick, a few pages back, shows her at about this time, outside that house of her daughter Janie. But in her earlier years, Bobba Chaya was, of course, the centre of the family. Sylvester himself was born in her house in Wynberg, since his mother Lily, the youngest child of the Rollicks, returned to her mother's care for the birthing. Sylvester's fair complexion and his cheerful disposition right from the start earned him, from Bobba, the nickname "Leuchtie" – light –he was such a delight.

## **Victor and Fanny Rifkin**

Fanny was the eldest daughter of Wolf and Chaya, born about 1872. As I wrote earlier, according to Lily's notes, she may have married Victor Rifkin already in Lithuania,. She died in 1927 so there is hardly anyone left to pass on memories of her, nor could I find her photograph. Victor, in his naturalization papers, records that he was born in Vainutas, a shtetl in the Raseiniai District, very close to Zemaici Naumiestis (Neustadt) from where Sammy Marks, President Paul Kruger's friend, had come. Victor's siblings and later his father Hirsh and mother Frume (nee Gurvich/Hurwitz) also came to the Cape. Hirsh arrived in 1898, and on his naturalization papers of 1902 gave his occupation as Backer (Baker), and place of birth Vainutas. He signed in Hebrew.

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<sup>22</sup> A tid-bit from the Will: One of the witnesses was D L Perlman, whose lawyer son, Hymie, was a partner with my cousin Ralph Cohen, and their firm drew up the ante-nuptial contract of Wilfred Stein and Chana Morgenstern, a generation later.

He formed a company "Rifkin and Company" with his son Louis who had arrived in 1896, aged 16, and they bought at least one property in Wynberg in 1903. The next record I have of Hirsh is a Death Notice, signed by his son Wolf Rifkill, stating that Hirsh had died in Palestine in April 1915 and then another Death Notice for his wife Frume who, it was stated, died on 19th April 1915, in Mea Shearim, Jerusalem, Palestine. This notice is signed by Sarah Menachemson, "daughter of deceased, present at death".

In my mother, Lily's, notes we have that "Sarah (went to Palestine, parents died there, of starvation)" and that Sarah had married Menachemson whom she had met in Israel (of course, Palestine at that time)<sup>23</sup>.

If Hirsh had indeed died of starvation, then the partnership between Hirsh and his son Louis might not have been that successful.

Later, however, as we have seen, Louis had a draper shop on the Main Road Wynberg. Another brother, Wolf, had his name incorrectly recorded on his immigration papers and let the error stand, becoming Rifkill rather than Rifkin, thinking that this would cause less confusion in their business world. According to a family legend (passed on to me by my sister Zena), the family fortune of the Rifkin-Rifkills was made when they bought the contents of a ship that had been wrecked in Table Bay. They cleaned and dried the goods and then sold them for a good profit. In any event, soon there were Rifkin and Rifkill shops of all descriptions along Main Road Wynberg and its side streets. Victor was listed in the South African Jewish Yearbook for 1929. I quote here the full record :

*RIFKIN. Victor, General Merchant. Born in Lithuania in 1875. Educated in Lithuania and South Africa. Came to South Africa in 1893. Married to Fanny Rollnick in 1896; has three sons and five daughters. President of the Wynberg Hebrew Congregations; Communal Worker and Philanthropist Postal Address: Main Road, Wynberg.*

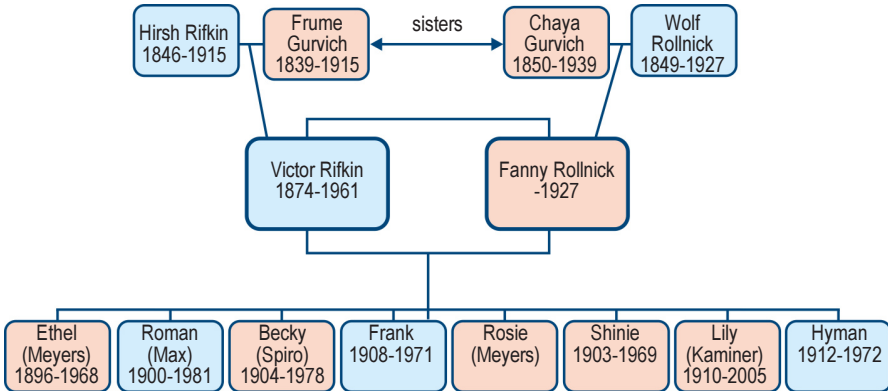
Useful, but there are some errors, like when he arrived in South Africa (1891 according to his Naturalisation application). Additionally, he was no longer married in 1929, but a widower. But he did have that number of sons and daughters.

His brother Louis had 7, his sister Mira Goldberg also 7, and his brother Wolf (the Rifkill) only 3. Their parents, Herschel and Frume, had had 7, setting the family off to a good start.

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<sup>23</sup> This was Mayer Menachemson, whose brother Jacob was the well-beloved Chazan (cantor) in our Durban synagogue (St Andrews Street) when I was growing up.

## Victor Rifkin and Fanny Rollnick and their eight children



Victor had a very long widowerhood, 1927 to 1961. After his wife died, many of his children in turn joined Victor in the store.

My memories of Victor date, I suppose, to the mid to late 1940's, as I recall him sitting benignly, hands on his walking stick, on that low wall on Beach Road near the Pavilion in Muizenberg. I see him talking to a brother. This was probably Louis Rifkin (who died in 1947).

Victor's grandson, Frank Myers from Moshav Timorim in Israel, writes:

*Because of your request I searched through old photos and have come up with a few photos I took in the Wynberg shul before they closed it down a year or so ago. It's of the leaders of the congregation in the thirties with my grandfather, Victor Rifkin sitting in the right hand corner of the front row (in photo at top of the next page).*



Of Victor and Fanny's children, Max (really called Roman Matthew) became the R M Rifkin who had a chemist shop on the Main Road Wynberg, while Frank was a well-loved doctor in Salford, England, who married Iris of the



Aboulafia family, cotton merchants in Manchester and Alexandria. Hymie, a psychiatrist, moved to the USA and, living alone, burned to death when his cigarette caught the bed clothes alight while he was asleep. Beckie married Charlie Spiro (more of her in her nephew's footnote below).

Two daughters, Ethel and Rose married the Myers brothers, Harry and Jack, respectively, from Ireland<sup>24</sup>. Lily married Phineas Kaminer (their daughter Jacqui preserved her mother's notes that formed the basis of some of the Wynberg story). Shinie did not marry.

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<sup>24</sup> Harry and Ethel's son Frank writes from Moshav Timorim in Israel: In 1932, my father Harry and his youngest brother Gussie Myers moved to East London to run a hotel together, taking my mother Ethel my sister Biddy (Freda) age seven and myself age three. His brother Jack and wife Rosie remained in Cape Town. Jack found work with Holms Motors as a car salesman while Rosie went to work in the V.Rifkin clothing shop on Main Rd. Wynberg, together with her sisters Shinie Rifkin and Beckie Spiro. My father later left the hotel and opened up a fruit shop in East London until 1934, then slowly sent us back to Wynberg, Cape Town. First, my sister Biddy with Gussie (by train) to stay with Shinie and our grandfather [Victor], from where [Biddy] never returned to the family home. My mother later returned to Wynberg with my six month old brother Philip where she started to work for Mrs. [Fanny] Nossel in her shoe shop in Wynberg. I was later sent to join her by car with three strangers. My father later joined us and together with Ethel opened a drapery store called the Globe Drapers on the Main Road, Wynberg. My mother continued to run the shop where she worked until she passed away in Dec.1968, my father [had] passed away before her from a heart attack in 1960. I left for Israel in Dec. 1951 and never saw my father again.

## Part three: The Matz, Levy and Cohen families

### Aron and Dora Matz

We saw how Aron Matz had found his wife-to-be Dora at the Friday night Kiddush at the Rollnick home. Aron would have been a welcome guest who came with much “yichus”<sup>25</sup>. His grandfather Shevach (Shevel) had been a well-known Rabbi in Aron’s home town of Darbenai, where the Matz family had been living for many generations.

<b>MAZ</b> (MACH?), Shevel	Aron	State rabbi since 1858	June- July  1859	Darbenai	KRA/I-49/1/ 4103
		Kaunas Guberniya State Rabbis		Telsiai	1
				Kaunas	184

After their marriage, Aron’s financial ups and downs eventually settled themselves. Hard work at their general dealership on the Main Road, Dieprivier, Plumstead, and with Dora running also a grocery, later a drapery shop and then Matz and Co, tailors, on the Main Road, Rondesbosch, they could begin to enjoy a comfortable life.

But they did work hard. Dora was so much at the store that it was her daughter, Bubbles (Ethel), who looked after the younger children. The parents travelled often to England to buy goods for their stores. Dora, in 1922, travelled alone to Fowler and Bowdon, London, presumably a wholesale drapers. This was the courageous Dora who in the family stories, as Dora Rolnik aged 18, had smuggled wheat across the border from Tavrig to Memel!<sup>26</sup>

Aron had his turn to visit and deal in London in 1924, a two-month stay abroad. and then Dorothy again, for almost three months in 1930 to deal with J A Ewing and Co<sup>27</sup>.

But in 1934, they combined business with a family trip over four months. The children were now fully grown-up. Aron and Dora took with them their two youngest, Ray, already a school teacher, and Regina, a student. They went first to London, then to Port Said and

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<sup>25</sup> " yichus is actually a Hebrew word (see Nechemiah 7:5) meaning lineage, distinguished birth, or pedigree" ... [http://www.torchweb.org/torah\\_detail.php?id=158](http://www.torchweb.org/torah_detail.php?id=158)

<sup>26</sup> All this travelling across the border to Germany had led to Dora being fluent in German. So much so that a granddaughter writes:” I remember (Grandma Dora) with her mandelkuchen and bridge-playing German friends... (She) had come out ...I understood from Germany - in fact she said Konigsburg . Her German was perfect and she also spoke Dutch. Everything about her was very Germanic.... We were also told how she went back to Germany shortly before 2nd world war to try and convince relatives to come to CT.”



on to Palestine, returning to London and then Cape Town, not omitting a visit to J A Ewing and Co.!

A granddaughter, Sydney, five at the time, remembers getting a "wonderful box of childrens' books from England. The 2 "Alices", Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens and many others, sadly long lost. Rudyard Kiplings etc." And in later discussions she remembers that "Ray never wanted to come here [Israel...wds] again as it was so hot. (But did in 1968). And when my Grandpa visited us in Ashdod circa 1963 (after visiting his brother in Salt Lake City), he was pleasantly surprised that we had electricity and running water!!"

I remember Aron and Dora living in a big house with a circular drive in front. Sydney writes: "This must have been Mont Clair, a very large house off Tenant Road between Wynberg and Kenilworth, where they moved in 1945. Mont Clair was a very ugly double storied house, with lots of sculleries off the kitchen, servants quarters, at least 5 bedrooms, and 2 whole bathrooms (for those days very exceptional) and a balcony extending the whole length of the facade, where children and grandchildren slept in the summers. By 1948 for their Golden Wedding they were living in "lower" Wynberg, near the shul."

That 1963 visit of Aron to his brother Samuel, then living in Utah, is a moving story. The two brothers, sons of Isaiah Matz of Darbenai, Lithuania, were both in the Cape at the beginning of the 1900's. Samuel was in business with Dora Matz's brother-in-law Louis Levy but the business failed and Sam, giving up on South Africa, went to England, Canada and then the USA. He and Annie, his wife, eventually settled in Utah, after wandering through Idaho and Wyoming. It was to be almost sixty years until the two brothers met again. This was to be their last meeting, since Aron died a few years later. Sam held on until the beginning of the next decade.

Aron and Dora, in contrast to Samuel, had remained in the Cape and, as we saw, eventually prospered.

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<sup>27</sup> A trading company, still is active in London. For its history see

<http://drs.library.yale.edu:8083/fedora/get/mssa.ms.1469/PDF>

James Allardyce Ewing was born in Fraserburgh, Scotland in 1857. He emigrated to Port Elizabeth, South Africa in 1877 and worked for Mackie, Dunn and Company. In 1890 he established the firm of J. A. Ewing and Company, with headquarters in London, and commercial interests in South Africa and Rhodesia. Ewing exercised great influence on the shipping and financial trade in South Africa. He died in 1924.



*On the back row Cecilia, Dora, Ethel (always Bubbles); on the front row, Shinie, Benjamin, Aron, Ray, and Abraham (Boytjie). Regina was still to come when this picture was taken. On the right, the two eldest daughters, a good deal earlier, but which is which? I would think that it's Bubbles on the right.*

The girls provided their parents with capable sons-in-law, as Wolf and Chaya Rolnick had been given the generation before. Cecilia married her cousin Chimp Lewenson, and we will deal with that couple when it's the turn of the Lewenson family. Bubbles's Sam Brunow eventually realized his dream of becoming a farmer, while their younger sister Shinie's Bernie Shub founded the Rex Trueform clothing enterprise<sup>28</sup>. Of the other children, Boytjie (Abraham) was a fine mathematician and a school teacher and won an Olympic medal for bridge<sup>29</sup>, Benny was a lawyer<sup>30</sup>. Ray became a history and English

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<sup>28</sup> The Shub family is known in South Africa as the name behind Rex Trueform, a major clothing manufacturer that has been in the Shub family for 68 years and is still in family hands. Its founder, Bernard Shub, started working at the age of 15 and soon established his own successful tailoring company, helped by funding from his father-in-law Aron Matz and a family connection Chaim Brunow. Its nucleus was a tiny workshop in Plein Street, Cape Town, where 12 people - two cutters (Philip Dibowitz and James Fortuin) and some machinists - turned out a small range. Initially, the firm produced work overalls. Then came WW2 and they received substantial military orders that set them up. Soon they were making suits for South Africa's Presidents as well as supplying major national and international retailers. (Bernard's success was less advantageous for small tailors, some of whom lost their independence and went to work in Rex Trueform.) By 1947, a year before apartheid, the company was turning out a million garments a year. In those days coloureds and whites worked together. As of February 2011, the company had a market capital of R284M.

Bernard Shub's entrepreneurial skill and fortune was passed on to his two sons and daughters. Stuart Shub continued the retail business, while Stephanie (Shub) Hoppen and her daughter Kelly Hoppen established themselves successfully in the arts and interior design fields. Wareham Shub entered the financial sector,

literature teacher and was also an excellent bridge player. She married Frank Bernstein, who had arrived as a refugee from Germany and served in the South African Navy during the War. The youngest, Regina, did not marry.

We can see the seven Matz children in this next photograph, taken at the Golden Wedding of Bubbles and Sam Brunow, which was held in the magnificent Shub residence, Stone House, Rhodes Drive, Constantia.

Aron was known to complain in his later years: “How is it that two parents can look after seven children, but seven children can’t look after two parents?”



*Left to right: Sheena (Shiney) Shub; Ethel (Bubbles) Brunow, Abraham (Boyttje) Matz; Celia Lewenson; Ray Bernstein behind; Regina Matz and Ben Matz.*

specializing in private equity and real estate, together with his wife Yoneen, until his death in 1993. In 2001, their son Dylan Shub joined his mother in the business and helped to develop Fortress Capital Management as an independent international multi-family office. <http://fortcm.com/page.php?page=22&&rt=16>

And, a nice history of Rex Truform up to the current problems with competition from China. <http://www.timeslive.co.za/sundaytimes/article114013.ece>

<sup>29</sup> His daughter writes: “Wilf, there was never bridge at the Olympics as such but yes, he was a champion and in 1934 won a bridge olympiad which was a competition played everywhere with the same hands. Ray was a wonderful History and English teacher, not only literature. Of course my dad was a wonderful mathematician and hence got on extremely well with your dad [Philip Stein, Professor of Mathematics]. I remember them sitting and chatting etc. for hours on end.”

<sup>30</sup> This was B R Matz whose name appears on the plaque shown earlier, as a committee member of the Wynberg shul in 1937. As a young man, in 1920, he was founder and editor of a youth magazine “Young Israel” issued by the Wynberg Young Israel Society. (Marcia Gitlin, *The Vision Amazing*, 1950, Menorah Book Club, Johannesburg, p267). He appears, together with his wife Lilian, in the 1929 South African Year Book. He was a founding partner of the law firm, Pincus and Matz.



*Having tea on the stoep at Champagne, Stellenbosch. Left to right: the farmer Sam Brunow, Philip and Lily Stein, Bubbles, the farmer's wife, and Violet Weinberg, who had driven the Steins out to the tea.*



*Aron and Dora (second and third from the left) at a banquet 1953, the 50th Anniversary of the Wynberg Shul.*



*Boytjie Matz and Bex (Coopersmith) at their Golden wedding.*



*Shinie (Matz) Shub between two sisters-in-law.*

## Sarah and Janie Rollnick.

We saw that the two eldest Rollnick daughters had each provided their parents with a son-in-law, capable young men, but perhaps a bit impetuous in business dealings in their younger days. Likewise, Janie and Sarah Rollnick were soon married, Janie to husband Harry Cohen in 1910, as can be seen in one of the twelve records in the South African Roots website<sup>31</sup> that refers to a Rollnick:

Surname: Rollnick	
Data Source: Simon's Town	
Marriage Couple	
Surname	COHEN-ROLLNICK
First Names	ROLLNICK
Age	Janie
Town in SA	22
Spouse's Name	Harry
Spouse's Surname	COHEN
Married Date	1910-09-29
Witnesses	
Notes	domestic duties
Ref No	80
Listing	Simon's Town marriages 6/4/1893 - 9/8/1923

Harry had been born in Skuodas (Skud), close to the Latvian border, his father being Elchanan (Khonon) Cohen (Kagan, as it was transcribed in this Jewish Gen record):

KAGAN, Honon		well-to-do; shop owner; 6 in family	1892	Skoudas	KRA/I-49/1/17526
		Box Taxpayers		Telsiai	155
				Kaunas	162
KAGAN, Khonon	Zelik	3 family members, a shopkeeper, well-to-do	29	Skoudas	KRA/I-49/1/23519
		Box Taxpayers	September	Telsiai	78
				Kaunas	24
			1904		

The record shows that Khonen's family, in spite of being well-to-do, had become depleted by three members during the period 1892 to 1904. One of those who left was Harry, who arrived in Cape Town in 1896, 26 years old. Harry and Janie Cohen opened up a shop in Simonstown, a coastal town, where the British Navy's naval base provided good custom. Two of their sons - Ralph (named in Hebrew Chona Reuven, the first name after his Cohen, the second after his Hurwitz, grandfather) and Victor - were lawyers. Victor was a keen

<sup>31</sup> [http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/CGI/cgi\\_RootWeb.exe](http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/CGI/cgi_RootWeb.exe)

deep sea fisherman. He and Ralph did much legal work in Cape Town. The third son, Issy was Principal of Weizmann Primary, a component of the Herzlia Jewish Day Schools in Cape Town, from 1958 to 1975<sup>32</sup>. In a Herzlia Alumni publication (edited by, and the following piece authored by, Issy's nephew Jeff Cohen) one finds: "If you were sent to him to be punished, he gave you sweets and sent you back. Everyone who was a pupil at Weizmann Primary when the late Issy Cohen was Principal will tell you this: there can be few educators who are remembered with such universal love and warmth. Issy was a mensch: an educator to his fingertips who loved working with young people and who dedicated his life to Jewish education in Cape Town."



*Harry and Janie Cohen*



*The three sons of Harry and Janie: Vicky, Issy and Ralph, and daughters-in-law, Iris (Dobson), Ruth (Futerman) and Riva (Selibowitz)<sup>33</sup>. (Ruth was Ralph's wife and Riva, Issy's).*

<sup>32</sup> Leah Perlman, the wife of Hyman Perlman, Ralph's partner in their legal practice, was Principal of the Herzlia Constantia School, overlapping Issy's tenure at the Primary School, while Ralph's son Jeff Cohen was Principal of the High School from 1997 to 2002.

<sup>33</sup> A son of Ralph writes: "But I can tell you one story about the way the brothers Ralph, Vicky and Issy interacted with one another. They all were incredibly davka and had explosive tempers (even Issy, believe it or not)." ... and, after a description of one incident, Ralph's son continues..." At which point my father leapt up and said to my mother, "Right Ruth, that does it, pack the bags, we're leaving this minute!". The whole incident lasted less than sixty seconds. Luckily my mother and Riva calmed them down and we didn't leave. When Issy died in June 1976, my father cried like a baby."

Their father Harry died in 1934. In 1950, Janie married again, to Albert Knopf, a widower.

Sarah and her husband, Louis Levy, also were shopkeepers. Louis originally started in business, not very successfully, with Aron Matz's brother Samuel, both Louis and Samuel (and, of course, Aron) having come to South Africa from Darbenai<sup>34</sup> in the Kovno region.

LEVI, Gesel	Bentsel 30	signed in Russian Voters	2	Darbenai	LVIA/1567/1/189
			September	Telsiai	79
			1879	Kaunas	3,8
LEVI, Dvera	Gesel, Bentsel Mere, Shmuel	10/12/1887	Darbenai	Darbenai	not filmed
			Raseiniai Kaunas	1887 27	LVIA/1226/1/1319
LEVI, Ite	Gesel, Bentsel Mere, Shmuel	3/3/1886	Darbenai	Darbenai	not filmed
			Raseiniai Kaunas	1886 7	LVIA/1226/1/1319
			6	Darbenai	KRA/1-162/1/1
LEVI, Dora	Gesel 20	dress-maker 10 rubles Postal savings Bank Records	July	Telsiai	123
			1909	Darbenai	119

*Records of Louis' father Hesel (aka. Gesel) Levy in Darbenai and of his daughters, Louis' sisters.*

A whole industry has been built around researching the Levys of Darbenai. A descendant, Arnold Levy, has written a moving history of life in Darbenai<sup>35</sup> and in nearby Kretinga. I was in a fierce email correspondence with members of the Levy family in the USA who had discovered the grave of Louis Levy in Sunderland UK while I knew Louis was buried in Muizenberg (his gravestone is shown here). A letter from Dorothy Levy, a daughter of Louis (my Louis) cleared up the South African part of the mystery. I reproduce it below since it is one of



*Louis, son of Hesel Levy.*

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas\\_lita/lit\\_00209.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_lita/lit_00209.html)

<sup>35</sup> <http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kretinga/behTree.htm>. I reproduce a few paragraphs from this book in footnote 40.

the very few letters from this and the previous generation of Wynberg Rollnicks that still survive. Dorothy writes "I do have some helpful information from my Dad's side. Harry, David...and Louis (my late Dad) were all first cousins and my late Grandfather was Hessel Levy, Reverend in the shtetel with 2 sons who were Rabbis and geniuses. But of course there are none left." Harry and David Levy had also emigrated to South Africa<sup>36</sup> while others in the family had left Lithuania for the UK and America<sup>37</sup>. According to Louis' South African naturalization papers, he himself had indeed gone from Darbenai first to Nova Scotia for some four years, before getting to South Africa in August 1900<sup>38</sup>.

Presumably, the Levys and the Matzes knew each other already in Darbenai, before they formed in South Africa a business connection (Samuel and Louis) and a family connection (Aron and Louis married sisters). Darbenai had less than a thousand Jews in the 1890's when Louis Levy and Samuel and Aron Matz were in the process of emigrating and both families were among the rabbis of the town. Dorothy writes concerning Louis, and the Jewish Genealogy website records this for Shevach Matz, the Matz brothers' grandfather. Indeed,

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<sup>36</sup> Louis and Sarah's granddaughter writes in an email letter: "this is very exciting for me. I remember Harry Levy very well (if it is the same one). He was married to Lena. They lived in a block of apartments in Johannesburg called Roxdale in Houghton."

<sup>37</sup> A son of David's writes: "Dorothy was in contact with the Levy branch that went to England and at one time she worked with one of them."

<sup>38</sup> Here is part of that correspondence about the Levys: From Eric Goldstein: Dear Wilf - I know about two different Gesel Levis. The one I think you are referring to was born in 1849 and was the son of Benzion Yitzchak (Bentsel) Levi and Chaya Shimke. Chaya was a sister to Bentsel Shimkhe, father of Aron Ber Skimkhe-Levy, father of the "other" Louis Levy. In fact I am pretty sure that Aron Ber adopted the Levy name instead of Shimkhe because of his brother-in-law. So that might be the answer to your mystery. The birth records from Darbenai, where there are several for the SHIMKHES, make it clear that this was their original name. I believe the husband's sister married into a prominent LEVY family and when the children migrated they took the name of their relatives, whom they joined.

Steve Levy to WDS: Your information ties in with something I heard from my late grandfather Harry Levy. He said that our original surname was Simchawitz and he changed to Levy when he left home for South Africa. He told us the reason for changing his name was in order to escape being drafted into the Army. This ties in nicely with the name Shimke. WDS adds: So Dorothy was correct...those other "Levys" were indeed her father's cousins but on the maternal Shimke side and not on her Levy side.



Aron's brother Itsik had married Khinde, one of the Levys (Levi) of Darbenai<sup>39</sup>:

Darbenai Telsiai Kaunas 9/6/1922	<b>MATS, Itsik</b>  <b>LEVI, Khinde</b>	Saya Sede Darbenai  Khaim Elias Khaye Khene Darbenai	26  28	husband merchant	J.LEVINAS  Kretinga 1922 Marria 14	Not filmed /  LVIA/1817/1/156
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101 FLAMINGO HOTEL  
CAROLINE STREET  
HOLLAND - 14/1/90

My Dear Sad.

SO GLAD TO RECEIVE YOUR LETTER. I WILL ALSO TRY TO BE PROMPT AS I LOVE HEARING FROM YOU.

I'M SO GLAD YOU HAVE MANY FRIENDS VISITING NATALIE - IT MAKES SUCH A DIFFERENCE.

I GOT A LETTER FROM STEVE KHELMA & AM WAITING TO HEAR AGAIN. I DO HAVE SOME HELPFUL INFORMATION FROM MY DAD'S SIDE HARRY - DAVID (NATALIE'S LATE FATHER) LOUIS (MY LATE DAD) WERE ALL FIRST COUSINS & MY LATE GRANDFATHER WAS HESSEL LEVY, MARRIED IN THE SHETEL WITH 2 SONS WHO WERE DOBBISS & BENIUSES, BUT OF COURSE TABORE ARE HOME LEFT.

STEVE PASSED MATRIC WITH AN "A" FOR SCIENCE & A "B" FOR MATHS & IS GOING TO WIFE TO DO A C.A. B. COMM. COURSE. I AM VERY PLEASED WITH HIM - HE WENT TO JAMELIA FOR THE LAST YEAR.

I PHONED NATALIE ABOUT JOYCE & SHE WILL PHONE ME BACK. I BELIEVE KEITH HAS LEFT FOR HOME

Dorothy Levy's letter.

<sup>39</sup> The only Matz from Darbenai unfortunate to be listed in the Yad Vashem Holocaust records was this Hinde (Levy) Matz, who was living in Memel at the time the Nazis invaded.

To the right is a picture of Bentsel (Ben Zion) Yitschak Levy<sup>40</sup>, Louis' grandfather (that is, Hesel's father), a baker of the shtetl Darbenai, as was Hesel himself:

The Jewish Genealogy records annotate Bentsel Levy as "Lives on Market Square (left side) Tax paid (in silver rubles) = 2.26 Property value = 10.04"

Louis and Janie had a shop on Lester Road, Wynberg, and eventually owned a building with three shops on the Main Road, Wynberg.

In the picture below, Janie Cohen is on the right, next to her is Sarah Levy. My parents, Philip and Lily Stein are on the left. You can see from Janie's stance what a fiercesome "ballabosta" (head of the household) she was. "Contradict?", she used to say in her fierce way,



<sup>40</sup> The following is an extract from a book called "The Behr tree" written by Arnold Levy, published in 1949, and is part of chapter 26 describing Ben Zion Yitshak Levy born in Darbenai (Dorbyan) 1823 and died 1898: "The house in Dorbyan of Ben Zion Yitshak Levy, father of Hessel, was charged with rabbinic lore. The Dorbyan communal Pinkas recorded a long line of the Levy family, many of whom held important communal posts in past generations: all held these posts because they were men of learning and piety. Ben Zion Yitshak, of blessed memory, was a man of learning and piety and ultra orthodox. He was never known to utter a mundane word on the Sabbath, on which day only "Divrei Torah" – words of the Torah- were spoken. During weekdays... his breakfast was sent to the Beth Midrash, where he was immersed in the study of Talmud, until lunchtime. Ben Zion was famed for his hospitality, and he seldom came home without bringing an 'orach' (a guest), especially on Friday nights and the Sabbath Day. The curriculum of the local cheder did not provide for anything further than The Five Books and The Prophets; consequently for the study of Talmud, Ben Zion engaged a particularly brilliant young Talmudic scholar to instruct his three sons". (edited from an email sent to me by a great great grandson, Steven Alan Levy).

before you could question a statement of hers<sup>41,42</sup>. Among other memories I have of Janie are her well-stocked larder of preserves and, especially, pickled fish. Sarah, and this is also clear from the picture, was a far gentler, tentative person. Of the four Levy children, Florrie died very young<sup>43</sup>, Benjamin became a lawyer, elegant Dorothy was in the fashion business, while Sam and his wife Esther were doctors in Muizenberg<sup>44</sup>.

## Part four: The Three Rollnick brothers

The brothers, Abraham (Abe), Roman and Robert (Robbie), sons of Wolf and Chaya Rollnick, all trained as pharmacists - a good starting career in those early days. One could get one's training "on the job", earning a small salary until one could set up independently in a chemist shop.

**Abe Rollnick:** I have always had a special feeling for Abe, a most colourful character, larger than life. Born in 1885, coming to the Cape in 1894, he was already travelling again in 1914. In a Shipping Manifest of that year, sailing on the SS Runic, Third Class, and arriving in

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<sup>41</sup> But a grandson writes that he "has no real memories of Janie, other than her exuberance and the great affection she showered on [me], complete with slobbery kisses." And he continues "Apparently she was devastated at first when Vicky announced he was marrying Iris Dobson, who was not Jewish and refused to convert. .... they somehow found some sort of bogus rabbi from Paarl who married them under what Iris always referred to as "four broomsticks and a piece of cloth". Victor and Iris were on a cruise... "somewhere between Maputo and Durban when Vicky woke up and said he was feeling poorly,... collapsed and died." Victor's brother Ralph was contacted and met the boat when it came in to Durban. "He told Iris he'd take care of a Jewish funeral but she was having none of it. The body was sent to Cape Town where he was cremated and the ashes scattered in False Bay."

<sup>42</sup> The reception for my barmitzvah, which took place in Muizenberg at the Cape at the end of 1944, was held in her house on Cromer Road.

<sup>43</sup> Her gravestone in the Cape Town Jewish Cemetery records gives her age as 4 at her death in 1920.

<sup>44</sup> There is a bench, facing the ocean, on the sea-front promenade between St James and Muizenberg that bears their name, honouring these two devoted physicians. Their daughter writes: "My grandfather Louis Levy... owned a building of 3 shops on Main Road Wynberg quite near where they lived in Wellington Rd. I remember Uncle Victor [Rifkin]'s shop where Becky and I think Rosie worked. I also remember Uncle Max [Rifkin]'s pharmacy. My mom had a medical practice in Wynberg and we often used to pop into the family shops. Uncle Max used to give us calcium chewable tablets for sweets." Clearly, the Rollnick descendants in Wynberg were in close contact.

Southampton on October 10th, 1914 (already during the war years), the 28 year-old described himself as a “Showman” , with “Foreign Countries” as his intended place of future residence. Indeed, “Showman” was a correct description. Early in 1913 Abe had leased the Electric Bioscope in Simonstown in the Cape, but he was not making a success of this. After he started to run the place, the electric plant broke down and he had to hand the cinema over to his father (our Wolf Rollnick), and work simply as the manager<sup>45</sup>.



*The Electric Bioscope in Brighton, UK, opened in 1909.*

Abe’s “bioscope” in Simonstown would have been one of the first electric bioscopes in South Africa<sup>46</sup>, and from these beginnings we South Africans always called our cinemas the bioscope.

Sailing from Liverpool on the SS Adriatic to New York on the 14th October, with future residence as USA, is now Arthur Rollnick, Showman, British, of the Hebrew race, son of Wolf Rollnick of Wynberg, Cape Colony (although it was now really Cape Province). So our Abe is now Arthur.

Abe/Arthur must have made a great impression on his relations in the USA, since memories of his visit have come down to us from the children of those who hosted him there. On the Gurvich (Hurwitz) side, Elise Josephson (Elias Abrahams’ granddaughter, whom we met earlier in this chapter) remembers her father Isaiah, Elias’s son, telling

<sup>45</sup> CSC 2/2/1/336 Ref 250 Precis written by Anne Clarkson

Plaintiff: Bensimon Berman. Defendant: Abraham Hirsch Rollnick, of Electric Bioscope, Simonstown or Vredenhof Road, Wynberg.

Rollnick owed Berman £16 12s 4d with interest from 24 September 1913. He said he couldn’t pay because his only income at present is salary of £10 a month. He offered to pay £2 10s per month towards the liquidation of this debt. He was the manager of the bioscope the lease of which is in his name and has 5 months to run. After he started to run the place, the electric plant broke down and he had to hand the place over to his father, and now manages it for his father. He is living with his sister and paying her £6 per month for board and lodging. He is not in good health and it costs him at least £1 per month for medical treatment.

<sup>46</sup> In 1908, the first theaters showing moving pictures exclusively opened in Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town. <http://www.bookrags.com/tandf/south-africa-7-tf/>

her about that visit<sup>47</sup>. Isaiah has left a full diary that covers the period of Abe's visit, and Abe's visit is carefully noted there, the entry for 30th March 1915 including: "Evening, Second Seder. A.Rolnick of South Africa, a relative of mother's, Sedered with us". You will remember that the connection between the American and South African branches of Elise Josephson's family had remained strong, with two of Isaiah's sisters having returned to South Africa while their siblings remained in the USA.

And on the Rollnick side, Sandra Silberstein who is Johanna Rolnik's great granddaughter wrote:

"My father was Milton B. Silberstein, son of Herman Silberstein, grandson of Svi/Hermann Silberstein, who married Johanna Rollnick<sup>48</sup>. I interviewed my parents at length about family matters, labeled and catalogued all of our photos, and made a primitive family tree ..... These were the notes that alerted us that the South African connection was through Rollnick. My parents told me two other things that your files made me wonder about. First was that one of our relatives was the leader of a black military contingent in S.A. Do you imagine this was Congo Joe? Second, was that a relative visited NYC from South Africa (presumably in the first decades of the 20th century); the person was selling something called "Twilight Sleep."<sup>49</sup> Do you have any thoughts who the SA visitor might have been? An early pharmaceutical rep. in the family?"

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<sup>47</sup> It was Elise's grandmother Gerta who was Abe/Arthur's cousin.

<sup>48</sup> Wolf Rollnick's sister....see the chapter on the Silbersteins. By this time, the two branches of the Rolnick family had been separated some fifty years, yet had clearly kept contact.

<sup>49</sup> Viewer Question: I am trying to find out the real name for twilight sleep; they used it in 1970 when women were delivering their babies.

Doctor's Response: The term "twilight sleep" applied to the combination of analgesia (pain relief) and amnesia (loss of memory) that was produced by a mixture of morphine and scopolamine ("scope") given by a hypodermic injection (an injection under the skin). The mixture of the two drugs created a state in which the woman, while responding somewhat to pain, did not remember it after delivering her baby. Twilight sleep was once in vogue in obstetrics. Morphine and scopolamine are both venerable drugs that have been around a long time. Both are also naturally occurring members of the very large chemical class of compounds called alkaloids. However, there were serious problems with twilight sleep. It completely removed the mother from the birth experience and it gravely depressed the baby's central nervous system. This sometimes made for a drowsy depressed baby who was difficult to resuscitate, to get breathing normally. Twilight sleep has, therefore, fallen entirely out of favor and is now merely a chapter in the past history of obstetrics. <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=10226>

See also an article in the New York Times January 31, 1915

Of course, the “pharmaceutical rep.” was Abe (whom we should really call Arthur when discussing his adventures in the USA), using the knowledge that he had gained as a pharmacist. But he was also Arthur Rollnick, showman, as this advertisement taken from the Wilmington Star of 19th November 1917 indicates. “Dr.” Arthur H. Rollnick, please note.

This was for motion pictures AND a lecture. I can just see my Uncle Abe rolling out words like those in that ad, in his fine baritone: “A Boon to Motherhood...Emancipating Womankind from her Ordeal”. I would indeed hear that voice thirty years later, as I describe later in this chapter. Abe’s daughter Rhona remembers her mother talking about Twilight Sleep:” I simply had to respond to your letters to & from Sandy (Sandra Silberstein...wds)to say that I'm certain that the Twilight Sleep person WAS in fact my father. I remember my mother talking about it many many times.”



And, on the next page from the Logan Republican, Utah, of August 30th 1919, Arthur is introducing and lecturing on a movie “Are You Fit to Marry”<sup>50</sup>, directed by the Wharton brothers, that dealt with the eugenics program of Dr. Harry Haiselden<sup>51</sup>.

Arthur was by now living in Brooklyn, New York and, according to the US Army draft registration that he filled out in 1917, the proprietor of a movie theater, with a great future ahead of him. His daughter, Rhona writes: I didn't know anything about his 1916

<sup>50</sup> The Black Stork. Also known as *Are You Fit to Marry?* in the USA (1917) American B&W : Five reels Directed by Leopold D. Wharton and Theodore W. Wharton. The film was presented by the Moral Uplift League in Baltimore, Maryland, as *Are You Fit to Marry?* in 1919.

<sup>51</sup> From 1915 to 1919, the prominent Chicago surgeon Harry Haiselden electrified the nation by allowing, or speeding, the deaths of at least six infants he diagnosed as physically or mentally impaired. To promote his campaign to eliminate those infants that he termed hereditarily “unfit,” he displayed the dying babies and their mothers to journalists and wrote a book about them that was serialized for Hearst newspapers. His campaign made front-page news for weeks at a time. He also starred in a film dramatization of his cases, an hour-long commercial

**Are You Fit To Marry?  
At The Lyric Theatre**

**DR. ARTHUR H. ROLLNICK WHO WILL LECTURE AT THE LYRIC THEATRE MONDAY**

The Lyric theatre will have as a special attraction next Monday a powerful photoplay feature "Are You Fit to Marry?" This picture is founded upon the greatest problems and realities of life. Why some children are away bobbing over with health, strength and the joy of living, while others are puny, weak and ill languished is clearly explained in this marvelous production. There is no smothered sentimentality, no dragging in of unnecessary scenes to render to low taste, but a clean wholesome presentation of facts that teach the inevitable lesson, driven home with the cold steel of truth. This picture is most interesting and should be seen by every grown child and adult—not alone from a standpoint of amusement, but for their own personal welfare. Bring your sons and daughters; it will do them good. The film has been produced by Dr. Harry J. Haiselden of Chicago and the plot is based on the Beltinger baby case, which recently caused a world wide sensation thru Dr. Haiselden's refusal to operate on the deformed baby.

This production has been arranged in a most refined manner, and in spite of the delicate subject with which it deals, there is positively nothing in it to offend anyone of either sex; but in order to avoid possible embarrassment, it will be shown to separate audiences only, and no children will be admitted.

The performances will be as follows: 5:15 and 7:15 for women; and 9:15 for men.



*Abe Rollnick, in the family's collection, taken in the late 1910's -- compare this with the newspaper ad.*

*And here is Arthur again, with another movie picture: Are you Fit to Marry?*

activities, except that I knew he'd spent time in the States, and that he had some association with Spyros Skouras". And who was Spyros Skouras?<sup>52</sup> By the time that our Abe knew Spyros, Spyros and his brothers, themselves only newly-arrived in the USA, were the owners of a chain of movie houses in St. Louis, Missouri. It would be nice to know that one of the movies that Abe handled was

shown in a Skouras theatre. The Skouras brothers went on to great things, eventually running Warner Brothers. Spyros became President of Twentieth-Century Fox. So Abe's time in the USA coincided with the very early days of the motion picture industry. And remember

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melodrama titled *The Black Stork*. In the film a man suffering from an unnamed inherited disease ignores graphic warnings from his doctor, played by Haiselden, and marries his sweetheart. Their baby is born "defective" and needs immediate surgery to save its life, but the doctor refuses to operate. After witnessing a horrific vision, revealed by God, of the child's future of misery and crime, the mother agrees to withhold treatment, and the baby's soul leaps into the arms of a waiting Jesus. The film was shown around the country in several editions from 1916 to at least 1928, and perhaps as late as 1942. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry\\_J.\\_Haiselden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_J._Haiselden)

<sup>52</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spyros\\_Skouras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spyros_Skouras)

that he came to the USA in 1914, already a “showman”.

But Abe did not reach the heights of those movie moguls. As Rhona writes: "I know the only reason why he returned to SA was because his brother Roman had died very suddenly [June 30th 1920...wds], and my father returned to CT to help and comfort his parents. Poor guy - he was so keen to make an exciting life for himself in the States - and he might have done just that."

He returned, presumably in the second half of 1920, and returned to pharmacy. Early in 1921 he went into business with his brother Robert, operating as wholesale chemists and druggists<sup>53</sup>. On the 20th June 1921, arriving in Southampton from Cape Town, having travelled First Class on the “Briton”, he now lists his “Profession, Occupation or Calling” as Chemistry, and his “Intended Future Place of Residence” as British Possessions. Returning to Cape Town on the 23 September, on the Arundel Castle, he lists himself more neutrally as “agent”, and S. Africa as his intended future residence. He had reconciled himself to a less exciting milieu than New York, and he would live in Cape Town for the rest of his life.

But our Abe’s life did not proceed quietly. First, he married Anne Simonhof, a fellow-Capetonian and they proceeded to form a family.

Sadly, their eldest child, Maureen, suffered from hypothyroidism, which at that time wasn't treated at birth as it now is. Indeed it may not even have been correctly diagnosed. Maureen died very young but having a poorly functioning child in the family made difficulties for all, even more so, of course, for Maureen herself. Meanwhile, Abe, still a cinema enthusiast, had opened a movie theatre in the Woodstock/Salt River area of Cape Town. My brother Sylvester writes that he saw some of his first films there, presumably as a little boy, visiting the family at the Cape.



*Abe and Anne on their honeymoon in Durban, early 20's*

<sup>53</sup> LC 364 Ref2149 (South African Archives)



In November 1927 Abe went on a very long voyage. First to the UK, in transit to Japan, 2nd Class, a “director”. Then, on the Empress of Asia, February 1928, from Hong Kong to Vancouver, Cabin Class, a “merchant”, and from there, crossing the border at Buffalo, NY, on to New York. From there, he sailed on the SS Hilda on the 19th November to Paris, to meetings of the Société des Cinéromans of France, founded by the great Russian-French film director, Serge Sandberg<sup>54</sup>. “Cinéromans” were much in vogue at the time,. Mostly crime serials, they were action-oriented narratives, revolving around one type of subject matter or even a single man<sup>55</sup>. What was the first half of that voyage concerned with? Cinema or pharmacy?

If all that travel, running a cinema and maybe an interest in pharmacy were not enough, Abe started a company, with Solomon Gordon, to make engineering devices, especially pumps. Rollnick and Gordon, Co., Ltd., listed in 1933 as the Columbus Suction Polisher



*See “Rollnick and Gordon” above the word “COLUMBUS” in the picture.*

<sup>54</sup> Serge SANDBERG (1879-1981) Created and managed Pathé-Frères branches in Moscow (1902), Berlin and Vienna (1904-05), Budapest and Bucarest (1906-07). Managed movie theaters in France in the Loire Valley from 1907 to 1930, and managed Palaces Populaires in Paris from 1910 to 1928. Produced and distributed movies from 1915 to 1950. Resuscitated Eclair from 1918 to 1930. Created the *Société des Cinéromans* and the *Studios de la Victorine* in Nice in 1919.

<sup>55</sup> French cinema: from its beginnings to the present: Remi Fournier Lanzoni, 2004 - Performing Arts

firm in Loop St Cape Town was incorporated also in England in 1936. Solomon Gordon himself lived in England (indeed, Abe's daughter Rhona was married out of the Gordon house in London, in 1958), but he was probably visiting in Cape Town when the plans to set up the company were made. Rollnick and Gordon had offices in Adderley St, Cape Town (pictured on the previous page) as well as in the UK .

The company held patents in pump design, and these patents were licenced to other pump, vacuum cleaner and floor polisher designers over the years, right through to the 1970's. An example of one of their pressure pump gauges can be found in the East Riding Museum in Yorkshire, and is pictured below:



*Pressure pump/gauge “History, Craft and Industry” Rollnick & Gordon Co. Ltd “London” Metal; glass “H:38cm; Circ:65cm. Pressure pump and gauge reading 0 - 40lbs. Silver metal body with black wooden handle. A plate on the base has the trade name 'Major' and 'Made in England. Rollnick and Gordon Co. Ltd' plus the specifications of the machine. ERYMS (BAG) : 1998.297.*

*Courtesy of the East Riding Museum.*

<http://www.eastriding.gov.uk/cs/culture-and-information/museums/museums-galleries-service/>

What I remember most is his cinema in Salt River, the Lyceum theatre. Salt River was a district with a working class, mixed-race population, so the Lyceum was not one of the smart, down town movie houses. But Abe was very fond of his theatre. I remember once going to a movie there (as white folk, we sat upstairs) and of his saying to us; “These carpets”, pointing to them forward and back, “cost me a thousand pounds, a thousand pounds” in that fine voice of his, with a bit of a burr, that I can still hear so clearly.

Our Uncle Abe, showman. He also entertained children with magic tricks. Here are some memories of Abe's tricks, from his nephew, Sylvester, and his daughter, Rhona:

*Sylvester:* When he came back to South Africa, he brought me a present, I think, and soon began to magic little presents for me out of acorns and to turn pennies into half crowns.

*Rhona:* And he used to be the magician at childrens' parties quite regularly.

*Rhona again:* I still remember the time, during the war when things were rationed, him producing a packet of Wrigley's Chewing Gum from under a bush on the top of Table Mountain!!

**Roman Rollnick**<sup>56</sup>: My mother said once that Roman was the



*Roman Rollnick age 35, around 1913*



*Bertha and Roman, wedding photograph, 1914*



*Bertha, probably next to the Pavilion, Muizenberg 1919*

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<sup>56</sup> Roman's grandson, Stephen, gave me access to a wonderful set of original records that had been carefully saved over the century, ending up in an attic in Cardiff, Wales. We are all indebted to the Roman Rollnicks for their loving care of these records.

most promising and successful of the brothers.

Hard to believe that, after Abe, but of course I could not compare the two... Roman died even before my elder brother, Sylvester Roman Stein, named after him, was born.

Roman, born in 1888 in Taurage, Lithuania, arrived in Cape Town at age six. His name Roman was after his maternal grandfather, Reuven Gurvich, his second name, Joseph, after his paternal grandfather (like Congo Joe). Being a Rollnick son, he studied pharmacy and made this his career. You will remember that he had supported his studies by milking the family's cow. He received his licence as a pharmacist on May 10th 1910<sup>57</sup>, and set up his first chemist shop in Malmesbury<sup>58</sup> in the Cape, some 65 miles North of Cape Town. He married Bertha (nee Shagam) early in 1914, in Johannesburg<sup>59</sup>.

Their eldest son Julian was born at the end of that year.

The (first) World War had started and this had two effects on Roman's pharmacy business. There was a great need to manufacture drugs locally and a great shortage of glass bottles to put them in.



*Kobe in the 1910's, when Roman, Bertha, Julian and Lily visited.*

<http://oldphotosjapan.com/en/photos/415/sannomiya>

<sup>57</sup> One of the treasures found in these records is Roman's business card displaying the company name Wentzel and Schleswig, suggesting that Roman might, early in his career, have worked for this long-established Cape Town firm.

<sup>58</sup> The area is especially known for its grain and wine cultivation as well as sheep and poultry farming.

<sup>59</sup> In the documents found in that attic are two letters from Roman to Bertha, written between their engagement and their marriage. As befits a mature lover, they are not simple love letters but are wise analyses of the relationship. Also described is an intended long honeymoon to Europe, but I can find no record that this took place.

Roman decided to go to Japan, still a neutral country, to buy bottles. Julian was very young but Roman's 21 year-old sister Lily (my mother) was available as baby-minder, and was excited to go with them. They sailed to the Far East, reaching Singapore on August 3rd 1916, on the SS Suiva Maru, stopping at Hong Kong on the 18th, and going on to Japan's then main port and trading station, Kobe.

Lily has told us many stories of that wonderful visit, like how the tailors were the first to climb onto the ship with measuring tapes, promising to have fine suits ready for their customers by the next afternoon. But she was horrified to see the poverty of boat families in Nagasaki. Discussing this with her daughter twenty years later, she was relieved to hear that it was all gone. She learned how to say Sayonara, learned the Japanese Imperial anthem and how to count in Japanese and this she taught her children:

Itchi, nee, san, she, go, rocci, cochi, coochi, coo, joo. And then Joo Itchi, Joo nee and so on.

Go is of course confirmed in the name of the board game, but as far as the other numbers are concerned, I am not so sure. My siblings

and I, who learned the numbers a decade apart, have them memorized with some slight variations.

Nowadays, one can of course simply download them:

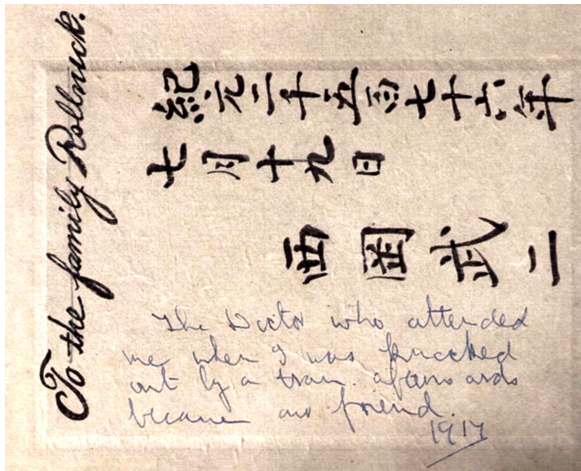
one	ichi
two	ni
three	san
four	shi
five	go
six	roku
seven	shichi
eight	hachi
nine	kyu
ten	ju

一	二	三	四	五
1	2	3	4	5
六	七	八	九	十
6	7	8	9	10
五	十	百	五	百
5 x 10 = 50	100	5 x 100 = 500		
千	元	*Gan' is sometimes used in place of the figure '1' for the first year of a period		
1000	1st			

<http://www.shotokankarate.ca/counting%20in%20japanese.htm>

So I hadn't remembered them so badly. After all, more than ninety years have now passed since Lily learned them.

There in Kobe, Lily was knocked down by a tram but so well attended to by a Japanese doctor (the annotation on the right, the back of the photo on the next page, is in her own hand) that she suffered no lasting ill-effects:





*Lily*



*Lily's doctor*

The long voyage with all its adventures was a great bonding opportunity for Lily and her nephew Julian and they remained very



*In Japan, 1916.*

close, Julian being always one of Lily's favourites.

On the previous page is a photograph of Roman and Bertha (she is third from the right, holding hands with a local woman) at what seems to have started as a tea party, but had gone on to bottles of beer. (Julian and his nanny, Lily Rollnick, were presumably tucked up in bed).

By 1919, Roman's pharmacy business was doing well, with a branch also in Cape Town, and the family was living in Oranjezicht, a fine part of the city. The picture below is a Google-eye view of the area. The (A) marks their house at 10 Sophia St., Cape Town:



With the end of WW1, there were new business opportunities for Roman's pharmaceutical interests. He took his family on a visit to Europe, via England, and the plan was then to get to Japan, with a visit to Palestine to be included if visas could be obtained. The family had increased, their second son Ezra (then called Israel) having been born in 1919.

They arrived in Southampton on the 20th May 1920, having travelled First Class on the Llanstephan Castle from Cape Town, arriving in Hamburg a few days later, where they met up with Bertha's father, Moses Shagam.

One month later, on the thirtieth of June, Roman was dead.

The family has preserved a marvelously thoughtful letter written by Roman from Hamburg on June 4th to Bertha's uncle Boris Shagam, then in the USA. The letter is the continuation of a discussion between Roman and Boris on Zionism and the resettling of Jews in Palestine in the aftermath of the World War. I can quote only a small part here,

where he writes “What I am concerned with is to help along my fellow Jews to make their life somewhat safe and help to eliminate that element of fear which permeates their very existence throughout Europe. I fully admit that if all humanity made up their minds to do away with all religion and nationality...then it would be better for all...but by the time ... humanity becomes sufficiently educated to (achieve this...wds), we will have hundreds more pogroms....”. He writes also of his plan to visit Palestine, in a letter full of warmth for the family in all its scattered locations.

In the middle of June, Roman returned from the Continent to England, for a short visit, in connection perhaps with his intention to take part in the Annual Conference of the Zionist Organization, to be held in London and to which he hoped to be a South African delegate<sup>60</sup>.

Lily Kaminer writes in her family notes “Roman Rollnick died very young on a boat bound for Hamburg where Bertha was awaiting him. He is buried in Hamburg<sup>61</sup>.”

ROMAN AND BERTHA ROLLNICK.

(LIVE IN STANES)  
 ① JULIAN NARRIWD SONIA KRILER.  
 ROMAN MULLISSANIE STEPHEN

LIVE IN ENGLAND  
 STEPHEN MULLISSANIE

② EZRA (DIED AGED 21)  
~~HUMBLED~~ CRASHED HIS PLANE  
 AS A FLYING BOAT  
 DURING WAR.

(1920)  
 ROMAN ROLLNICK SENIOR (DIED)  
 VERY YOUNG ON A BOAT BOUND  
 FOR HAMBURG WHERE BERTHA WAS  
 AWAITING HIM. HE IS BURIED IN  
 HAMBURG



The gravestone in the Jewish Cemetery of Ohlsdorf in Hamburg is incorrect in some details, his place of birth for instance, and the date of his death<sup>62</sup>. The second line of the Hebrew reads “He-chashuv v’hanechbad”, that is: “The Distinguished and Honoured” Reuven Yosef Rollnick, certainly a fitting description.

<sup>60</sup> The official letter of invitation from the conference organizers reached him after his death.

<sup>61</sup> Naomi Silverton (great granddaughter of Johanna Rolnik) and I have tried very hard to find out the circumstances of this tragic death. Naomi’s researches discovered his grave.

<sup>62</sup> Bearing in mind the errors, it seems most unlikely that it was Bertha who had the stone set up.



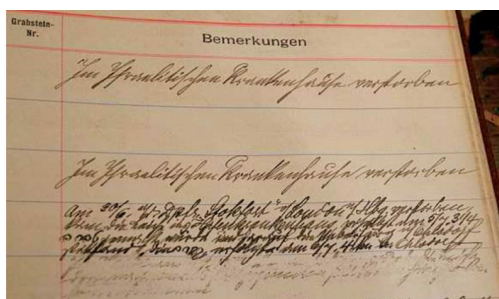
Mr. Gerold Helmts from the Jewish Cemetery located a book “were [sic] the dead persons were registrated (one of four which survived Hitler)”, with the information that he had died in the Hafenkrankenhaus (Harbor hospital) where he had been brought by the police. The picture below shows what we have. If only we could read it! The fourth row is the relevant one. As far as I can make out, it begins with a date 30/6 and tells of a boat that left that day from London for Hamburg. After some other dates, there is the Hebrew word טהרה, meaning purification presumably of the body. But what else can one make out, except “Hafenkrankenhaus” and the name of the cemetery, Ohlsdorf?

But we received important help from the Jewish Community in Hamburg:

*Dear Mrs. Silverton<sup>63</sup>,*

*I received following information: Roman Joseph Rollnick, 32 years and 4 months old, pharmacist and chemist, died June 30th 1920.*

*His last address: English ship 'Stockport'; the address on land: Hotel Phonix, Kirchenallee 56. Death register in Hamburg - there is no record, instead off 'Certificate of police in Hamburg, Department V' buried on July 6th 1920.*



*About the circumstances of his death: there are no possibilities of finding it out. There are no documents by the police or the hospital.*

*Maybe there is a logbook of the ship 'Stockport' existent with some information about the circumstances of death of Mr Rollnick.*

*Sorry I can not tell you something positive and more informative. I wish you all the best.*

*Sincerely*

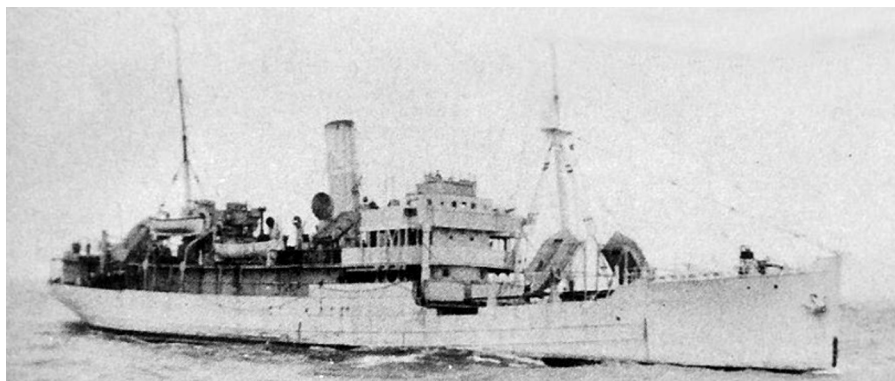
*Judith Landshut "*

So that very difficult-to-read fifth word in the burial records is “Stockport”, the name of the ship on which Roman travelled from London to Hamburg.

His death notice (in the South African Archives, dated 8th July

<sup>63</sup> “From: Landshut Sent: Thursday, February 17, 2011 2:42 AM

To: Naomi Silverton Subject: JGH, February 16th 2011 - Roman Joseph Rollnick



*SS Stockport. Owners: London and North Eastern Railway "Port of registry: Grimsby Built 1911, lost 1943"* <sup>64</sup>

1920) states that he died at the Phoenix Hotel, Hamburg. This was probably where Bertha and his children had been staying.

I did finally manage to get a copy of the Death Certificate<sup>65</sup>, (on the facing page) an entry in the Marine Register, with the diagnosis of heart failure.

What a young age to die, only 32! Today, his cholesterol levels would have been carefully monitored and the ship would have carried some means of resuscitation.

That last letter of his, written to Boris Shagam<sup>66</sup>, was sent to Roman's son Julian many years later (27/1/1938), accompanied by the

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<sup>64</sup> The SS Stockport disappeared in the North Atlantic on 24th February 1943, most probably sunk by a German submarine. On board were the 64 man crew, and an unknown number of "survivors" pulled from the sea by the Stockport after their own ships had been torpedoed. In peacetime the Stockport had been a passenger-cargo steamer, home port Grimsby, plying the London & North Eastern Railway (LNER) company's routes across the North Sea to Holland. Her wartime role was as hospital rescue ship escorting convoys across the Atlantic Ocean. She survived several convoys in which many ships were sunk, rescuing over 400 of their crew. On convoy duty on her last voyage, an explosion of a torpedo announced the presence of U-boats, other ships left the vicinity as swiftly as possible, but the Stockport's lonely task was to steam towards the site of the explosion and search for survivors. Without the protection of a convoy, the Stockport was an easy target. Her crew regularly risked own lives to save others. Several ships were sunk as convoy ON-166 made its way across the ocean. Each time the Stockport stopped to rescue survivors she lagged further behind. No one knows the exact details of her last moments. <http://www.carlscam.com/stockport/sstockport.htm>

<sup>65</sup> The copy is dated, by a coincidence, exactly 91 years after Roman's death. I checked the co-ordinates given in that copy. They indicate a position some hundred miles west of Hamburg.

<sup>66</sup> Boris was, at the time of Roman's death, in the USA, having sailed from Yokohama to Seattle, in February 1919.



Pursuant to the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Acts 1894 and 1970 and the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953.

Return of Deaths at Sea, reported to the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen under the provision of "Merchant Shipping Act, 1894" and 1970, During the Month of <u>July 1920</u>												
Name of Ship	Official Number	Date of Death	Place of Death	Name and Surname of Deceased	Sex	Age	Rank, Profession or Occupation	Nationality	Last Place of Abode	Cause of Death	Passenger or Member of Crew	
Stockport	132111	30.6.1920	At sea Lat. 53° 51' N Long. 6 3/4° E	Roman Joseph Rollnick	Male	32	Passenger	British Subject	Regent Palace Hotel London	Heart Failure	Passenger	
CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the MARINE REGISTER OF DEATHS Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the seal of the said Office, this 30th day of June 2011												

The Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 (sec. 34) provides that any certified copy of an entry purporting to be sealed or stamped with the seal of the General Register Office shall be received as evidence of the birth or death to which it relates without any further or other proof of the entry, and no certified copy purporting to be given in the said Office shall be of any force or effect unless it is sealed or stamped as aforesaid.

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE. ©CROWN COPYRIGHT

WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY



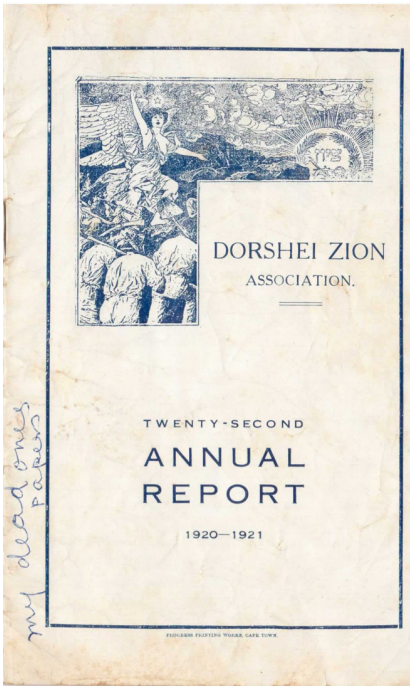
### *A copy of the Death Certificate*

words "I am enclosing here your father's letter written a few days before his tragic end. The letter reached me when he had been dead. The discussion concerns our views on Jews and Palestine and holds good even today... he was prepared to donate £500 for the Zionist cause.....in going over his letter I see him clearly with his kind and energetic face.....".

An obituary in the Dorshei Zion Annual Report for 1920-1921 (on the next page) describes Roman's personality beautifully, and outlines his contribution to Zionism in South Africa.

Roman had been very successful also in his business activities. His Estate, filed in South Africa, listed the inventory of his movable and immovable property as including 12 houses in Mowbray, valued at £8000, shares £2000 and life assurance policy £3000. In terms of the will, the surviving spouse inherited the entire estate. So Bertha was left over £13,000, equivalent today to some two million pounds. She was left bereft, but not destitute. (Until the estate was wound up, she did live in straitened circumstances in a boarding house close to the station in Kenilworth, in a less desirable area than she had been used to. By 1923, she had moved with the boys to a house again in Oranjezicht, half a kilometer from where she had lived when Roman was alive.) There remains a sad shipping manifest with Bertha, the two Master Rollnicks and a nurse, Miss Shorter, returning to the Cape from Southampton on August 20th 1920.

Roman's parents were devastated. On the following page is a



### Obituary.

Before actually commencing to report on our Association's activities during the last twelve months, we would devote a little space to those who, alas, are no more with us.

In **Mr. R. J. Rollnick**, the committee had an active worker and zealous advocate of the Zionist cause. A young man of indefatigable energy, it is the irony of fate that he should have been cut off on a journey which included a visit to Eretz Israel, and whence he would surely have returned still more earnest in his efforts.

**Mr. L. Rostowsky**, was one of the most strenuous workers the Jewish community ever possessed. His is a household name, particularly with the poorer members of our community who never failed to find in him a friend and helper, no communal work was initiated in which Mr. Rostowsky did not shoulder more than his share of the burdens.

**Mrs. Dinah Zuckerman**, was for several years back a leading figure in local Zionism in general, and in the Bnoth Zion in particular. She showed by her endeavours that the daughters of Israel can hold dear and labour for the cause with as much, if not greater, zeal than the merfolk. Her loss is an irreparable one, and her name will go down among those whose memory will only be forgotten if Capetown should forget Zionism.

**Mr. S. Goldrich**, the Honorary President of the S.A. Zionist Federation, who was one of the pioneers of the National Cause in South Africa when Zionism was in its infancy in this country, did not fail to make his influence felt through the four provinces of the Union during his lifetime. South African Zionists will always see in him an earnest and lovable leader.

To the relatives of the deceased we would express our heartiest sympathy, and say that our loss can be reckoned only second to theirs.



mournful picture of the two of them with Bertha and the two little children, in the parental home in Wynberg:

Roman's brother, Abe, made the decision to give up his exciting career in the movie business in America and came home to support his parents. With the third brother, Robert, he took over Roman's pharmacy businesses, and ran these for some time before returning to his cinema activities.

After Roman died, Lily and Bertha remained very close. We often

were with her when we came to Cape Town, from Durban, for the summers.

Bertha later married Eljazz (Loi) Berezowski, who owned a wood and box-making factory, and was able to provide her and the boys with a suitable life style. As a little boy, I used to go fishing for bass with Berezowski.



*Bertha Berezowski in the family home in Kenilworth, with Kirstenbosch in the background.*

Julian became a publisher, setting up the "African Bookman"<sup>67</sup> that produced finely-wrought books, with a South African liberal book-list<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> The African Bookman, an 'alternative' or oppositional publisher established by Julian Rollnick in Cape Town in the 1940s, provided reading matter for the (often newly) literate urban African, until it closed in 1948 because of financial difficulties and problems relating to promotion and distribution. Among its authors were Es'kia Mphahlele, today one South Africa's best known writers and critics, whose first collection of short stories, *Man Must Live*, was published by The African Bookman in 1947 because Mphahlele was unable to find another publisher in the South Africa of that time. The African Bookman offered an outlet for many progressive writers and scholars, black and white, despite operating in a repressive racist society, and it also pioneered popular publishing in African languages.

He married Sonia Krikler<sup>68</sup> and they had two children. One of them remembers: “My first and earliest memory of being hugged is by Aunt Lily somewhere around Stellenbosch.... To my little boy mind, she was huge and warm.” If today one Googles “Rollnick”, most of the 134,000 citations that one finds are to one or other of Roman’s grandsons.

Berezowski had wanted the younger son Ezra to join him in the family business, so Ezra initially studied for a commercial degree, but didn’t like the idea of being a businessman. Loi’s son Anton Berezowski took his place running the factory.

Lily’s close friendship with Roman was inherited by the children on both sides. Ezra, Sylvester and Zena were great friends. But in another tragedy to the Roman Rollnick family, Ezra, who had joined the South African Air Force during the Second World War, died in a flying accident off the coast of West Africa where his flying squadron had been on guard against German submarines<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> Sonia Rollnick (nee Krikler) was born in Russia in 1923. When she was two years old, her family came to Southern Africa, settling in Rhodesia. She was educated in Salisbury (now Harare) and in Cape Town where she qualified as a teacher at UCT. A lover of languages, she taught herself French and studied Russian. Inspired by the language and humour of the Coloured community who lived and worked near her home in Newlands in the Cape, she started writing short stories with this community as the subject. Seven of the stories were published by *The New Yorker* between 1958 and 1961.

<http://www.lib.uct.ac.za/mss/index.php?html=/mss/newaids/BC1254.HTM&msscoid=533>.

<sup>69</sup>His nephew Stephen writes [I have edited the comments a little... wds] My uncle Ezra J. Rollnick, aged 25, was pilot-in-command of a Wellington bomber which carried a crew of six - two pilots, a navigator, and three weapons officers. They were based at Takoradi airfield as part of the SAAF/ RAF North African and Atlantic support base. They flew missions in the North African campaign, Italy and also in the Atlantic to stop German shipping, especially submarines, sneaking about south of the Mediterranean.

I asked the SAAF for his file which had been kept secret under a 50-year rule. It contained a report of the mission in which it was stated that his was the only body found by a US support ship. There is no indication whether they were shot down, or whether the aircraft simply crashed on what was a low-level night mission. My grandmother Bertha always kept a bracelet around her neck with the only other photo I have ever seen of him: It showed him in uniform standing with her.



*Ezra Rollnick, 1919-1944; with his flight crew (Ezra bare-headed, in the centre); the Malta Memorial to pilots lost over the sea<sup>70</sup>*

**In Memory of**  
**Lieutenant EZRA JONATHAN ROLLNICK**  
**328929V, South African Air Force**  
**who died age 25, on 16 October 1944**  
**Son of Bertha Rollnick, of Cape Town, South Africa, B. Comm.**  
**Remembered with Honour**  
**TAKORADI EUROPEAN PUBLIC CEMETERY**  
**Commemorated in perpetuity by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission**



<sup>70</sup> The Malta Memorial, built on a site provided by the Government of Malta, commemorates those who lost their lives whilst serving with the Commonwealth Air Forces flying from bases in Austria, Italy, Sicily, islands of the Adriatic and Mediterranean, Malta, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, West Africa, Yugoslavia and Gibraltar, and who have no known grave.

See: [http://www.624squadron.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=133](http://www.624squadron.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=133).

I thank Pauline Kahn for this picture. She writes: "My interest is because I am linking this to the loss of my brother. He and dear Ezra were both lost in October '44 within 4 days of each other: one in the ocean and one in the Mediterranean sea. I have a small van Gogh picture which Ezra left with me for safe keeping. As a student in Cape Town I lived opposite Aunty Bertha in Kenilworth."

**Robert Rollnick:** Robert was the youngest brother and closest in age to my mother Lily, with little over a year between them. Indeed, both were beneath the age at which the Shipping Manifest would deign to list them when they arrived in the Cape. Surprisingly, Robert and the family that he subsequently formed were never close to us. True, they lived in Oudtshoorn, not in easy reach of Cape Town, but the two towns are only 400 or 500 Km apart while our Durban, where we grew up, was three times as far away. Yet we managed to get to the Cape practically every year, travelling by boat along the coast while we could and then by train during the War, when the threat of Japanese submarines and the dearth of shipping forced us to go by train. Indeed, all that I remember about Robert, and that a weak memory, is of someone coming on to our Union-Castle ship while it stopped at Mossel Bay, between Durban and CapeTown, and that was my Uncle Robert. The ships could not yet enter the harbor at Mossel Bay, so Uncle Robert came to us hoisted up in a basket from a little boat onto our deck.

They lived in Oudtshoorn because Robert's wife Florence Kahn had a "weak chest" and needed the dry air of the Karoo in which Oudtshoorn was situated. The treatment worked – Florence reached her three score and ten. Being a Rollnick brother, Robert trained as a pharmacist and was a chemist all his working life. Here he is as a young man. "Sincerely yours, Roby".

At 21, about his age on that studio portrait, he visited London, arriving on the Union-Castle's Galeka, Third Class, on 26 November 1913, a chemist. So he had got his qualification<sup>71</sup> and had come to see the world. It would appear that soon after his return to the Cape, he married Florence Kahn, and at the end of December, 1918, their first child, Eugene, was born. Robert entered into a business arrangement with fellow-Capetonian Abraham Dusheiko to manufacture chemicals and food products at Strand St in Cape Town.<sup>72</sup> By 1919, he is listed as a chemist in Malmesbury, 80



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<sup>71</sup> It would appear that Robert also qualified as an optician, perhaps in parallel.

<sup>72</sup> LC 340 Ref 1822 Memorandum of Articles of Association of Rollnick and Dusheiko Ltd. Registered under the Companies Act on 28 April 1919. Robert Rollnick and Abraham Dusheiko, manufacturers of chemical, starch, food products and other articles of a kindred nature, 119-121 Strand St., Cape Town.

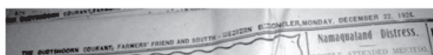


Km north of Cape Town. In 1921, he and his brother Abraham, recently returned from the USA, formed a company that took over Robert's older pharmacy businesses in Cape Town and Malmesbury and, in a more ambitious plan, were to act also as wholesalers.

Abraham presumably ran the pharmacy in Cape Town. Five years later, Robert's and Florence's daughter Irene joined Eugene. It would seem that things were not easy for them financially since in a codicil (dated 26 November 1931) to his mother's will, she revokes an earlier (1928) will, now excluding Robert from the list of heirs "because I think I have made him sufficient monetary advances during my lifetime. However, I do not wish him to be called upon to make repayment to my estate, of the aforesaid advances." The last sentence suggests a mother softening her heart towards her youngest son.



Florence and Robert



**ROBERT ROLLNICK**

The undisputed advantage of Christmas presents is their usefulness in every day life. What can be nicer than a pair of spectacles for your Mother? Or a pair of Pinc-nez for Grandfather? Whilst the most becoming gift to your friend is good sight in and out of season. Nice glasses must be accompanied by expert testing of the sight, and your sight can be scientifically tested by Mr. Rollnick with the most up-to-date knowledge of modern methods. Every pair of glasses is guaranteed to be of the best value.

WHOLESALE & RETAIL  
 CHURCH STREET,  
 OUDTSHOORN, 24/10/1930.  
 M. Rev. P. G. Viljoen  
 Local.

**Dr. to ROBERT ROLLNICK,**  
 Eyesight Specialist, Chemist and Optician.  
 Pure Drugs. Reliable Medicines. Developing and Printing.

Oct 21 To Per 10 6.

Phone 33. P.O. Box 146  
 OUDTSHOORN.

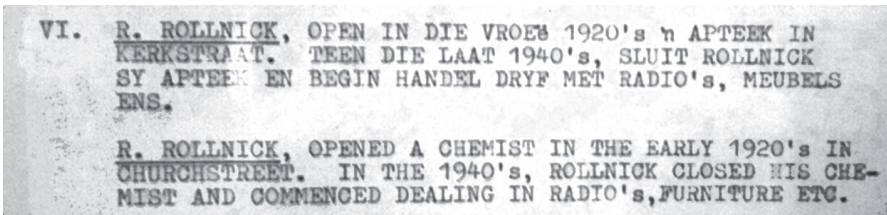
Received from M. Rev. P. G. Viljoen  
 the sum of six pounds twelve  
 shillings and six pence

ROBERT ROLLNICK.  
 £ 12 6  
 P. G. Rollnick  
 24/10/30  
 P. G. Rollnick  
 24/10/30

And here is a sale of spectacles for 12 shillings and sixpence:

A picture on the previous page shows that by the end of 1924 Robert had already branched out into being an optician as well as a pharmacist, and was still an optician in 1930. (I am indebted to his grand daughter, Marissa Rollnick, for the pictures, some of which are from the Oudtshoorn Museum):

Indeed, things did not go easy for Robert. He had to close his business as pharmacist and optician and move into other trading activities:



A granddaughter writes: "I liked him a lot and he spoilt us. He had a reputation for being a 'business man'/ wheeler dealer. He bought and sold cars".

By Robert and Florence's arrival in Oudtshoorn, I suppose in the early 1920's, the town was already past its prime, its economy based on what was still left of the ostrich feather trade but also tobacco farming and trading and sheep farming<sup>73</sup>. Jews had been by far the largest component of the traders in ostrich feathers and they still had a major share of the commerce of the town. They had begun to play a considerable role also in the town's affairs and already in 1913 the town's mayor was a Jew. Most Jews spoke Afrikaans fluently and were well integrated into the white community. Tension between Jews and Afrikaners began during the First World War when most of the town's Jews supported the British side while many Afrikaners were still anti-British after the trauma of the Boer War. Economic conditions hardened in the 1920's and 1930's and blame for the plight of the poorer members of the Afrikaner community fell on the successful and often still wealthy Jews.

As Coetzee writes: *Resentment towards the Jews mostly became public during election time, when Afrikaner suspicions were triggered by Jews' political affiliation with the English. Afrikaners habitually called Anglophone Jews lackeys of the British. Most Oudtshoorn Jews therefore participated in civic rather than national politics, and as individuals rather than an ethnic group, so as not to attract undue attention. But at least until the mid-1930s, Jews were welcome to support the Nationalists. S. P. le Roux (The town*

<sup>73</sup> This section is based on "Fires and Feathers: Acculturation, Arson and the Jewish community in Oudtshoorn, South Africa, 1914–1948" by Daniel Coetzee. *Jewish History* (2005) 19: 143–187.

leader), himself a farmer, was usually polite towards local Jewish voters. Some Jews supported his programs, for example, Robert Rollnick, who managed the local National Party-controlled newspaper, the *Kango Bode* [meaning "Messenger of the Kango area], and sat on the Oudtshoorn National Party executive between 1925 and 1936. Rollnick had many National Party friends and described Le Roux as "a very nice fellow who had never done anything to offend his Jewish constituents."<sup>74</sup> He and some other Jews regarded the anti-Semitic content of the National Party agenda up to the mid-1930s as insufficient "to influence the country in general." They sided with the Nationalists despite the disapproval of their co-religionists. Louis Herman explained: . . . [The Nationalists] were good to us [Jews]. They never picked on us, they were never anti-Semitic, and when you wanted to see somebody, you went to the front door, not to the back door like you did with the United Party. Leslie Newman's father, an English Jew, retained his loyalties towards Britain throughout his life, yet described himself as a "Hertzog man" (a moderate Nationalist) simply because he "thought their policies were better." This, however, changed with the ascendancy of the radical D. F. Malan in 1939. Malan would become Prime Minister of South Africa in 1947 and the architect of Apartheid.

Radicalization of the Afrikaner population and a developing outright anti-Semitism were fostered by events in Europe and the rise of the Nazis and Fascism in general. Greyshirt and Blackshirt movements recruited young poorly educated Afrikaners<sup>74</sup>. The new war against Germany again led to renewed anti-British and, in parallel, anti-Jewish actions, with egg-throwing and graffiti on Jewish-owned stores. The movement culminated in a wave of arson attacks on (mostly) Jewish stores and factories, the story being fully described in Coetzee's fine article. After the war, economic anti-Semitism continued as the Afrikaners developed their own commercial interests, often in competition with the established Jews. Robert Rollnick had played his part in the story of Jew and Afrikaner in Oudtshoorn but he and most of the town's Jews left for the big cities, in his case to Port Elizabeth.

During all this time, Florence had kept studying, using University of South Africa correspondence courses. According to my mother, Lily, Florence accumulated in this way quite a number of degrees. The photograph of her above shows her holding what was probably a degree certificate.

Robert developed stomach cancer and was involved in a minor train accident (in which he had to climb out of the train window) on

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<sup>74</sup> From an interview by Arthur Markowitz, "The Story of South African Jewry – Oudtshoorn Jewry Today" in *SA Jewish Times*, 27 February 1948, 6, quoted by Coetzee (*loc cit.*); Rollnick quit the Nationalists only in the 1940s, when he found their anti-Semitism unsavoury.

his way to visit Johannesburg in 1966. There his illness suddenly worsened, possibly aggravated by the results of the accident, and he died in hospital in Johannesburg. Florence contracted flu some years later, also on a visit to Johannesburg, and died in her sleep. They are both buried in Johannesburg.

Their son, Eugene, became an anaesthetist, marrying Beulah Marcus, who was a hairdresser at the time but later became an active worker in South Africa's Black Sash movement. A fine oral history of her life exists<sup>75</sup>. The two had met while Eugene was studying medicine and Beulah's income at that time helped him complete his studies and then bring up their two daughters, Donna and Marissa. One became a noted academic<sup>76</sup>, the other overcame a childhood polio to become a clinical psychologist.

Robert's and Florence's daughter, Irene, married an Englishman, Fred Jackson, in an Army marriage.



*Robert in the 1960's shortly before his death.*

<b>Name:</b>	ROLLNICK, Irene D
<b>Place:</b>	Cape Town
<b>Country:</b>	South Africa
<b>Year:</b>	1945
<b>Page:</b>	3356
<b>Spouse's last name:</b>	Jackson
<b>Record source:</b>	GRO Index Army Marriages (1881 to 1955)
<b>Name:</b>	JACKSON, Frederick W
<b>Place:</b>	Cape Town
<b>Country:</b>	South Africa
<b>Year:</b>	1945
<b>Page:</b>	3356
<b>Spouse's last name:</b>	Rollnick
<b>Record source:</b>	GRO Index Army Marriages (1881 to 1955)

<sup>75</sup> See [http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventories/inv\\_pdf/AG3298/AG3298-1-162-text.pdf](http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventories/inv_pdf/AG3298/AG3298-1-162-text.pdf)

<sup>76</sup> In addition, Marissa is an Active Masters' swimmer (holder of 5 South African Records and rated in world top ten) and is a choral singer (singing in the Symphony Choir of Johannesburg).

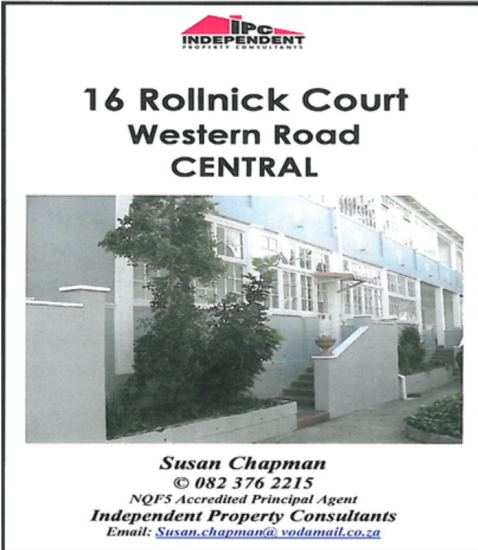
They went into the property business in Port Elizabeth. It had worried Florence, who was very religious, that Fred was not Jewish, but he converted to Judaism<sup>77</sup>.

As Irene's niece writes: "Irene Jackson was in the estate agent business and I think ran into cash flow problems – through borrowing from Peter to pay Paul, she ended up in financial difficulty having indebted my father and her own children; she was (then) R5m in debt – around 1986. My father [Eugene .. wds] was declared bankrupt and she skipped the country. Her business partner committed suicide. Irene died in England some years later. The story hit the headlines in the Sunday Times in South Africa."

Fred and Irene Jackson's daughter is still in Port Elizabeth. Their son settled in the USA. It was perhaps he who, as we saw in the chapter on the Chicago Rolnicks, met

a descendant of Chicago's Joseph Rolnick, thus closing the arc of separation that had gone from Upyna in Lithuania to South Africa in one direction and to the USA in the other.

At least for the Rollnick family we have, from Irene's efforts, a building to our name in Port Elizabeth!



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INDEPENDENT

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**CENTRAL**

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## Part five: Philip and Lily Stein<sup>78</sup>

Lily was the youngest of the Rollnicks, born half a year or so before the family left Taurage for South Africa. Being the youngest in a family struggling to establish itself in a new land didn't prevent her growing up with a life-long cheerful disposition, full of impish humor. For instance, when exactly was she born? She would tell us...on the 29th February, and that would satisfy us when we were very small, but not after we had learned the Rule of Four. A leap year is one divisible

<sup>77</sup> A niece writes: I believe the conversion was very smoothly done.

<sup>78</sup> Since this section concerns my own family it is, of course, much built on my own reminiscences.

by four, so that she would have to have been born in 1892 or 1896. If the first, she would have been two when they landed in the Cape - she wasn't. If the second, then born in South Africa. Also, not so. So she was just pulling our legs. Bear with me - there will be other examples like this in what follows. The earliest story we have from her is from her school days. Remember that these children were "greeners" having recently come off the immigrant ships and still not sure of their English grammar. In her class was a girl from the Spitz family. A naughty girl would raise her hand: "Look, Miss [as we called our teachers, even in my time] Sarah Spitz".

Another story was about an adventurous 20 mile hike with some friends along the sands from Muizenberg on the False Bay coast to Somerset Strand, with the return journey being a ride on some farmer's cart. We got this story when, many decades later, we told Lily about Natalie, a friend of ours here in Jerusalem who came from the Strand. It appeared that our mothers, young girls at the time, had known each other and had both taken part in that adventure. Natalie's mother remembered a song that they had sung about "seaweed in her hair". Maybe this one?<sup>79</sup>

Soon after leaving school Lily, intellectually adventurous as well as physically so, began to attend the discussion evenings held in the St James home of Ruth Alexander, cycling from Wynberg in order to do so. These evenings were the intellectual center of Cape Town in those days. Among those attending at various times were the scientists Frederick Bodmer and Lancelot Hogben<sup>80</sup>, historian Benjamin Farrington and even Mohandas K Gandhi. Ruth herself was the daughter of Solomon Schechter, of Cambridge University, who had

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<sup>79</sup> The Irish Seaman's Song:

Listen close my children  
And I'll tell you all a tale  
About a young Irishman  
Who set sail

Out on the sea  
He met a maiden fair  
With scales on her tail  
And seaweed in her hair

Lie dee lie dee lie dee lie dee  
Lo dee lo dee lo dee lo dee

<sup>80</sup> Bodmer and Hogben would go on to co-author the fine book *The Loom of Language*, while Hogben wrote also the very influential popular science books, *Science for the Citizen*, and *Mathematics for the Million*, aimed at educating the masses. I grew up on these books.

brought the world's attention to the famous Geniza trove of ancient Jewish documents in Cairo<sup>81</sup>. Ruth had married Morris Alexander, a lawyer and public figure in Cape Town. Her story, that includes her leaving Alexander for Benjamin Farrington thus scandalising the Cape Town community, is well told by Baruch Hirson<sup>82</sup>. We grew up hearing about Ruth.

There is a photograph of Lily at about that time (1912), not on a hike but at the wedding of her friend Dinah Stein to Max Grodzinski. Philip Stein's mother (her future mother-in-law) is on the second from top row in the middle, between her daughter Rachel and son-in-law Davis. Among the young men in the top row is Philip Millin, later to become a judge, and married to the novelist Sarah Gertrude Millin. On the left of the second row are the Shocks. He kept a liquor store on Main Road, Wynberg and his wife Bessie (nee Stein) was a friend of Lily's. Their son would also become a judge. On the right of this row are Minnie and Harry Shore, with the bridal couple, of course, in the middle. Why the three little boys on the bottom row are wearing those white collars is that they were the Davis children from "up country". They did not have such smart clothes as the town dwellers did and so they were provided with these collars to make them look fancier!



Lily is in the top row, on the right. No good saying "in the big hat",

<sup>81</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo\\_Geniza](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo_Geniza)

<sup>82</sup> Baruch Hirson: "The Cape Town Intellectuals: Ruth Schechter and Her Circle, 1907-1934". The Merlin Press Ltd (UK) 2001

since all the younger women were wearing big hats.

But, you ask...why have we gone on to talk about the Steins? This book was supposed to be about Rollnicks! Well, Lily and Dinah, the youngest of the Stein girls, were great friends, and so Lily was at the wedding. But Philip Stein was not. He was studying at the time in Cambridge, soon to return to the Cape. The photograph was therefore from 1912 or 1913, when Lily was 18 or 19 (unless her birthday WAS on February 29th). Lily had heard much about this brilliant brother of the Stein girls and, a clever girl herself, was interested. But Philip had other plans. Probably it's best at this time simply to quote a couple of fairly long sections from his wonderful autobiography (the whole work can be found at: <https://sites.google.com/site/atlasrolnikmorganstein/>).

"I returned to South Africa in June 1913. I met Lily almost the first day of my return. When I went to visit my sister Bessie who was living in Wynberg there, so to speak, on the doorstep was Lily. She was a close friend of my sisters, Bessie and Dinah and had heard a lot about the wonderful brother who was in Cambridge. She was nineteen when we first met and had, I think, romantically fallen in love before we met with the idealised picture of me the sisters presented to her. I liked her straight away. She was bright, alive, boyish, a perfect companion to walk with and surf with in the Muizenberg sea. I could see she liked me. However, I did not think of marriage. I was twenty three, besides that, I was in my mind married to mathematics. My ideals, Littlewood and Hardy, were confirmed bachelors. I had imbibed the Cambridge tradition of those days, when married Fellows of a college were still rare. The monastic tradition still survived."

And: "The fourth quarter of the year 1919, I again took a temporary post as lecturer in Applied Mathematics at the Cape Town university. At the beginning of 1920 I was unemployed. I was not worried. I had been reasonably successful as a lecturer. I was known throughout the English medium universities in South Africa and something would turn up. I went down to Muizenburg to walk and surf with Lily Rolnik [P. Stein spelling ...wds]. Then came a crisis. One day when I met Lily she gave me to understand that this was our last meeting. It transpired there was a nice young man named Lurie<sup>83</sup>, in a fair position and moreover, a good Zionist, who wanted to marry her. This was terrible! I could not face up to losing her. I went home and dropped her a note to meet me once more. It was the first letter I had ever sent her. When we met, I proposed and was accepted. Thus ended happily

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<sup>83</sup> Zena and I think that the name was Fig, not Lurie, and he became the father of Lollie Fig, who married Philip's nephew Solly (Lawn) Shore. Another link: Once, as a teenager, Zena "sat next to someone at a cinema, he introduced himself and said that I looked just like Lily at that age".



six and half year courtship”.

Isn't that lovely! Anyway, they were married in the Wynberg shul on a Sunday, the 15th February, 1920. (P. Stein's dates above are probably a little wrong. According to his autobiography, they were married six weeks after that fateful letter.) The following Sunday they were strolling around Durban, where Philip had been offered a lectureship in Mathematics at the newly-established Natal Technical College<sup>84</sup>.

Natal had only recently been finally pacified. Bambatha's rebellion<sup>85</sup>, just fourteen years before, must have been fully in the memory of the town's inhabitants. Durban was a long way away, physically and culturally, from Cape Town. The couple, having found the local Jewish community, settled into an apartment owned by the Alpers, who would be long-standing friends, a friendship that was passed down the generations<sup>86</sup>.

To furnish their apartment, the Steins went to the auctions. The auctioneer, during his prattle:

“Two pounds, do I hear Two pounds and ten shillings?” would

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<sup>84</sup> Philip was really a very good mathematician. I quote the following from his autobiography: “The Professor of Philosophy at Cape Town brought this problem to the Maths Departments: “Can one devise an index (a coefficient) to show there is a greater association in a person between ability in say arithmetic and algebra and arithmetic ability and say history?” That was nearly 60 years ago, and not one of them had ever done any statistics and in due course Brown [the Head of Mathematics... wds] put it to me. I took it home for the week-end, and rediscovered Karl Pearsons' correlation coefficient. It took quite a lot of argument with Brown to convince him that I had something.”

<sup>85</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bambatha\\_Rebellion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bambatha_Rebellion) Once they succeeded in getting face to face with and surrounding the rebels at Mome Gorge, the British victory in the unequal battle was inevitable, given the vast disparity of forces. As the sun rose, colonial soldiers opened fire with machine guns and cannon, on rebels mostly armed only with traditional assegais (spears), knobkerries (fighting sticks) and cowhide shields. Bambatha was killed and beheaded during the battle; however, many of his supporters believed that he was still alive, and his wife refused to go into mourning. Bambatha's main ally, the 95-year-old Zulu aristocrat Inkosi Sigananda Shezi of the amaCube clan (cousin and near-contemporary of the Zulu king Shaka) was captured by the colonial troops and died a few days later. Between 3,000 and 4,000 Zulus were killed during the revolt (some of whom died fighting on the side of the Natal government). More than 7,000 were imprisoned, and 4,000 flogged. King Dinizulu was arrested and sentenced to four years imprisonment for treason.

<sup>86</sup> An Alper daughter was the physicist Tikvah whose work on the disease Scrapie led the way to the understanding of the prion diseases such as “Mad Cow” disease and Kuru. (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/prions/>). Another daughter, Minnie (Price), became an obstetrician and delivered me.



*The Alper family. The parents, Tyvil and Abraham in the centre, daughters on either side, Polly, Rose, Minnie and Tikvah (on the right of the second row). Lily used to say “Rose is the prettiest, Minnie the most good-natured, Tikvah the cleverest and Polly the all-rounder”.*

insert the phrase “Kaif niet, Kaif niet” to warn Lily and Philip not to buy this one. In October 1920, Lily went by boat back to Wynberg to deliver her first child in her parent’s home. Philip followed her when term ended. This was “Leuchtie”, the golden-haired Sylvester<sup>87</sup> Roman Stein. Zena Athene arrived a short year afterwards, but all this was “BW”: Before Wilfred. In 1927 the little family left for Cambridge where Philip was to work on his PhD. (I have the Shipping Manifest). It was a successful time for Philip although he needed another trip a few years later (on his own this time, it being no longer BW) to complete his research.

A short while after their return to Durban, a neighbour came around to the house to complain that the two children (Sylvester and Zena) had been teaching their child to swear. Swearing? It didn’t seem likely. It turned out that all three had been playing “Cambridge



*Lily and Philip in the Lake District, 1927, with the great mathematician, L J Mordell<sup>88</sup>*

<sup>87</sup> We grew up knowing about the great mathematicians, Cayley and Sylvester, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Joseph\\_Sylvester](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Joseph_Sylvester)

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.gap-system.org/~history/Mathematicians/Mordell.html> Mordell is best known for his investigations of equations of the form of  $y^2 = x^3 + k$  which had been studied by Fermat.

Boat Races”: “Come on Jesus! Come on Christ’s”. By now, the Steins were living in a house at 261 Innes Road. Their good friends were Mabel and Leonard Landau, who lived nearby. Leonard was a statistician at the Natal Tech and knew Philip through this work contact. Indeed, he copied out Philip’s PhD thesis for its presentation, the work being unreadable for most people, with Philip’s terrible handwriting. Alas, Leonard was killed riding his motorcycle when Mabel was just about due to deliver their daughter Lynette. They moved into our house where Mabel was delivered of Lynette a short time later, on the bed where I was also to be born a month or so after. Mabel married again to a Mr Bader and they had a son, Julian.

The Morrison family in Escombe, nine miles into the country, were other great friends<sup>89</sup>. Moses was an early Zionist, one of the Hoveve Tzion and had married Michaella Brasofsky, who had come to South Africa as a Hebrew teacher from Palestine. Before they had a car, Lily and Philip would walk out to Escombe. When they did get a car it was a very small one. (Going from Durban to Pietermaritzburg one had to drive up Botha’s Hill or “Bother us Hill” in Lily’s phrase). Morrison had built up a huge mail order house, the biggest in South Africa at that time. He fell sick with some lung disease and Michaella had suffered a stroke. During the annual Passover phone calls from his bedside to his sister in another part of the country, while we all kept quiet during this Long Distance Call, he would ask her “Nu, wie geist du?” and he would answer “Fine, Fine” to what was apparently the same question in reverse. Was this Yiddish I wondered? Did “Fine, fine” mean “Dreadfully ill”, as he and his wife looked to little Wilfred? Again, we inherited their children as our friends. Zena and the youngest Morrison daughter Evelyn became lifelong friends; Evelyn served in the same section of the army as Zena, became a distinguished statistician in Durban, and her daughter, Debby Bradshaw, follows in her footsteps. Moses and Michaella’s son David became my best friend. We shared a stamp collection but after a tiff one day divided it up, country by country, so that the King George VI and Elizabeth

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<sup>89</sup> From Philip’s autobiography: “Moses Morrison had lived for a time in Cape Town. I think Lily knew him casually as a somewhat quaint character. He was a member of the Young Men’s Zionist Association in Cape Town and so was a friend of my brother-in-law, Aron Matz. So when Aron visited us in Durban - it was in our first year of married life - we called on the Morrisons. He was living in Escombe, a suburb of Durban about 9 miles away across the veldt”. And from M. Gitlin “The Vision Amazing” Menorah Book Club, Johannesburg, 1950: “No representative of a Jewish cause ever came to Natal without paying his respects to this distinguished-looking Zionist veteran, and his Palestinian-born wife...and (being) made to feel that he was performing service by doing so.”

Coronation Commonwealth series was broken into two, a thing we should certainly not have done<sup>90</sup>.

A riddle that Moses Morrison often used to ask us children: “A duck in front of two ducks, a duck behind two ducks, a duck between two ducks. How many ducks altogether?” But say it in a good Litvak accent and a twinkling smile on your face.

Durban for us was the beach every Sunday, the July Handicap race with all the crowds of visitors from Up Country, the Jewish Club for Philip’s weekly bowls game.

The family kept close contact with Wynberg. Philip’s salary as a university teacher was not really sufficient, so he became examiner and then Chief Examiner of the country’s matriculation examination in Mathematics. This meant several hard weeks of marking exam scripts in a team sitting in Cape Town. We stayed with Philip’s sister, Minnie and her husband Shore at 1 Hof Street, a wonderful house close to the Gardens and to the Mount Nelson Hotel, or with Lily’s brother Abe, at 59 Kloof Rd, Sea Point.

Lily was very involved in Durban’s local Jewish community. During her tenure as Chairwoman of the Durban Jewish Ladies Guild, she democratized it to the Women’s Guild. There was a problem when



*Tea with the Durban Jewish Women’s Guild. Lily Stein in the middle, Eileen Goldberg on the left, but who is that on the right?*

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<sup>90</sup> Dear David. A handsome boy, a good athlete with a fine brain, he studied Anthropology at Cambridge and went on an expedition in the Kalahari with Laurens van der Post ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurens\\_van\\_der\\_Post](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurens_van_der_Post)). There, the first symptoms appeared of the bipolar disease which led to his eventual suicide. Our eldest son is named after him.

Mrs K was elected as Secretary. By custom, this year's Secretary was Treasurer the next year, Vice-Chair the following and then finally Chairwoman. But what will happen to the Guild when Mrs K becomes chairwoman? But apparently the Guild survived.

The Guild instituted a Flower Cards program. Instead of giving flowers at Rosh Hashanah (the New Year), people gave a donation, the recipient getting a beautiful green card with a choice of greetings in calligraphic script and the proceeds going to local charities. Our living room would be piled with a mountain of green cards to be put into green envelopes and these envelopes addressed, the list ticked off and no mistakes made. Queenie and Eileen Goldberg (sisters-in-law and great family friends) and Lily and maybe Carrie Hart, all sitting around and gossiping while the work was being done. Did Lily knit at the same time?



*Philip and Lily's great friends, Mike and Queenie Goldberg<sup>91</sup>*

Gertie Hackner was with us every evening. When the lights dimmed at 8 pm (when the town switched from the day to the night electric generator), it was time for Lily and Philip to walk Gertie from our house at 408 Manning Road to hers at number 456.

Perhaps I can give you some feel of what life was like in the Stein household. From Lily we had learned the Alphabet (you have to pronounce it properly):

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<sup>91</sup> Mike and Queenie's son Jonathan writes: "My parents, Mike and Queenie Goldberg, were great friends of Philip and Lilly Stein for many years. Mike used to go for long walks with Philip along Manning Road, every week, and, if I remember correctly, Queenie and Lily walked separately, though not as regularly. My father was very interested in world affairs, particularly during and after the 2nd World War. I believe he regarded Philip as his guru in such matters (and possibly in everything else), judging by the frequency with which he would quote Philip. "Philip says..." was always stated in great awe. Having heard the guru quoted on everything that was going on in the world, I once asked my father from what source Philip drew this authority, given that mathematics and not politics was his field of expertise. My father's reply was to this effect: When you have Philip Stein's wisdom and intelligence, you can master any subject quite effortlessly. That conversation has always stuck in my memory."

'A fer 'orses, B fer mutton, C fer your self, D ferential, E fer Adam. F fervessence, G fer Police, H 'fore beauty, I fer Novello, J fer oranges, K fer rancis, L fer leather, M fer sis, N fra dig, O fer the garden wall, P fer a penny, Q fer billiards, R fer mo', S fer you, T fer two, U fer me, V fer la France, W fer a bob, X fer breakfast, Y fer heaven's sake and Zefer breezes.

Some things from Philip: First, "the Last Will of the Beduin". A rich Beduin sheik had three sons and seventeen camels. In his Last Will and Testament he left his worldly goods as follows: *Half to my eldest son, one third to the second and to my youngest, one sixth*. What could they do? Cut the camels into pieces? But, passing through the desert, came a wise man, riding on a camel. "Take my camel" he said, "Take it, add it to those your father has left you and follow out his will." They did so. This gave nine camels to the eldest, six to the second son, and two to the youngest. Seventeen in all. "Now you can give me back my camel" said the wise man. They gave it to him and he rode away off into the distance. Seventy years later, I still puzzle about how this works out.

We also grew up on "Boarding House Arithmetic", which I seem to recollect was by Stephen Leacock. Here are two propositions that I remember:

(1) A Single Room has Position but no Magnitude

(2) All Double Rooms being Occupied, a Single Room becomes a Double Room.

Some more mathematics around the dinner table: a story of the great Indian mathematician, Ramanujan<sup>92</sup>. Ramanujan, then unknown, had some time before written a long letter from India full of astounding mathematics to G. H. Hardy, one of Cambridge's great mathematicians, known well to Philip. Hardy, spotting his genius, had taken Ramanujan on as a colleague. Ramanujan was in hospital and Hardy visited him. Ramanujan: Anything interesting on the way here? Hardy: not that I noticed. Ramanujan: Well, what was the licence number of your taxi? Hardy: nothing special, 1729. Ramanujan: My dear Professor Hardy, don't you know that this is the smallest number that, in two different ways, is the sum of two cubes?<sup>93</sup>

And then another memory of Philip. While we are sitting around the dining table, he puts out his hand to get the salt, reaches out and stops. For a full half minute his hand stays there. Then he nods his head to himself and takes the salt. What theorem had he just proved, I wonder?

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<sup>92</sup> <http://www-history.mcs.st-and.ac.uk/Biographies/Ramanujan.html>

<sup>93</sup>  $1729 = 1000 + 729$  and also  $= 1728 + 1$

Ours was a liberal family. Members of the Race Relations Society. But we had three house servants. The young gardener we called Tommy, although his real name was Mohan Ragnunan Singh. He was an orphan, who came to us looking for work and stayed on for years. When he was very young, he had worked for his foster father who used to call him in the morning with "Ootaji, Ootaji, Pajiree Hookiah". Decades later when I was in Delhi, I met the mother of my daughter's college friend. The mother being a Professor of Hindi, I asked her what the words meant: "Wake Up, Wake Up. The sun is shining". Eventually, when "Tommy" grew up, Philip found him a job at a printing firm and we were honoured guests at his wedding.

I remember my mother's telephone order to the kosher butcher (he was Mr Klug...his son became Nobel Laureate in Physics and President of the Royal Society, Lord Aaron Klug) that ended with "and a shilling's worth of boy's meat, please". Once, when we entertained an African Professor and his wife for dinner, we were all waited on by our African cook. In some Durban families, not ours, the waiter would have worn white gloves and a sash. When a certain member of our community became, in Lily's estimation, too rich, we cut down our connections with them.

The rise of the Nazis in Germany meant a heavy involvement of Lily in community affairs. The refugees, those lucky enough to get immigration certificates through the hard lobbying of the local community, had to be met at the boats, and found housing and jobs. The Eichengrunds, Nussbaums and Ronsheims all went through Lily's hands, sometimes staying temporarily with us. Theo Ronsheim, who had first studied Chemistry and then got a PhD in Law, became Secretary of the Friends of the Hebrew University, of which Philip Stein was President of the Natal branch. Years later, Zena "inherited" the Ronsheim twins and guided and cared for them when they needed help. Their mother, Nan, was a painter with a delicate touch. Herbert Coblans, originally trained as a chemist, took the post, with Philip's advice, of Librarian at Natal University and later became the Librarian of UNESCO in Geneva. Hans Meidner<sup>94</sup> was another of Lily's

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<sup>94</sup> Hans Meidner, scientist, born January 14 1914; died September 11 2001 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). 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.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2001/dec/22/guardianobituaries.highereducation>

successes. He arrived in Durban as a young man. Lily found that he had "scientific interests", so she found him a job washing bottles for a pharmacy firm! He later became an internationally known botanist. I don't remember the Ballins having passed through Lily's hands, but I do remember how much they and the other refugees, cultured Europeans all of them, contributed to our life in Durban. It was at the Ballins that I first heard Stravinsky's Rites of Spring. A long way from the weekly concerts at the City Hall with Edward Dunn as conductor.

In the mid 30's, every Friday evening, Philip and Lily held a "Left Book Club" coffee evening, to which Abe Goldberg (later a politician and Member of Parliament), his brother Mike Goldberg (whose son Jonathan wrote that recollection of his father's walks with Philip-footnote 91), and Leslie Rubens (later Senator), a faculty person (perhaps Coblans), and others used to come. These were very energetic arguing sessions, in the house in Princess Alice Avenue. Leslie's father was devout, so Leslie and his wife Pearl first attended their family dinner, and afterwards, barred from smoking or driving, would stroll up to us for the coffee. These were very critical international years, of course, where the elder Stein children first heard about what was taking place in Germany.

After the War, with all its tensions, the death of two soldier nephews, the news of the Holocaust, the return of Zena from her



*Johannesburg station, November 1951. Left to right: Sylvester; Zena, Ida Susser, Jenny holding Lyndall, Lily, Philip holding Jeremy's hand, Mervyn Susser and Wilfred (whose family was five years off).*



military service in Oudtshoorn, and eventually Sylvester from his in England, the children left home for good and began to establish their own families.

When Philip retired, he and Lily travelled to Grahamstown where Philip was a teacher for a year at Rhodes University. Then followed a year in Nairobi at the University of Kenya, and another in Kampala, Uganda, at Makerere University. In Lily's words, she and Philip were the Uhuru fairies, since each year the country in which they were living got Independence (Uhuru). Finally, they moved to London where Sylvester and his wife Jenny had bought a wonderful house (62 Regent's Park Road, overlooking Primrose Hill). That is where Philip wrote his autobiography and where they celebrated their Golden Wedding:



*Lily and Philip's Golden Wedding 15th February 1970  
in 62 Regent's Park Rd, London.*

*Top row (l to r): Wilfred, Allen Hutt (Jenny's father), Sylvester; Second row, two Morrison daughters (Lorna and Natalie, third and sixth from the left and their husbands fifth and seventh) and also Iris Rifkin, extreme right; Third row, apart from Philip and Lily, Jenny Hutt Stein and Frank Rifkin; Bottom row, three children of Jenny and Sylvester (Alexandra, Harriet and Lyndall, first, fifth and sixth from the left). Jeremy Stein must have taken the picture.*

In his last years, Philip had been recommended by his doctor to have a glass of whiskey every evening and this was indeed his last nourishment,

through one of those bent straws, in his final illness. Sylvester would come every day, and being Lily's son, could tell him a fresh joke.

Lily in her widowhood was often visited by my friend Sharon Kark, herself very ill at the time. One day, she came up to Lily. "You must come down to the street and see what is there in the hedge." It was a bird, but a picture of one that Sharon had hung onto the hedge.

Lily said to me once: "You know, every night, just before I fall asleep I say: May his Dear Soul rest in Peace". When Lily moved finally into an Old Age home, she still had her cheerful disposition. Her last night there, she led the little group in a sing-song.

And their children? Sylvester trained as an electrical engineer and used his training in World War Two in the Navy, degaussing ships<sup>95</sup>. After demobilisation, he remained on in England, where he had been posted by the Navy. Becoming an actor, he was taken on by the Old Vic and later toured South Africa with the Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies and Marda Vanne company. I remember him acting in "The Winslow Boy". When he needed a solid earning base, with the coming of children, he became a journalist and eventually Editor of the African magazine "Drum"<sup>96</sup>. Leaving South Africa for London, he wrote



*Sylvester, in the middle, on his way to winning the 100m over-75's at the 1997 National Veterans Championships.<sup>97</sup> Photographer David T. Hewitson*

<sup>95</sup> The original method of degaussing was to install electromagnetic coils into the ships, known simply as coiling. In addition to being able to continually bias the ship, coiling also allowed the bias field to be reversed in the southern hemisphere, where the mines were set to detect "S-pole down" fields. British ships, notably cruisers and battleships, were well protected by about 1943. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Degaussing>.

<sup>96</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drum\\_\(South\\_African\\_magazine\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drum_(South_African_magazine))

<sup>97</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvester\\_Stein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvester_Stein)

novels, ran a publishing house and turned one novel “Who Killed Mr Drum” into a play. As if this wasn’t enough, he took up sprinting and on many occasions was Britain’s Champion Veteran sprinter and Gold Medallist.

Zena started her academic career as an historian at the University of Cape Town, becoming Gold Medallist as her father had done in his time. After the war, she turned to Medicine. In her class at the University of the Witwatersrand, was her and her brother’s schoolboy friend, Mervyn Susser. Zena and Mervyn married and formed a formidable and, later, world-renowned team



*Zena and Mervyn*

of epidemiologists<sup>98, 99</sup>. One of their major achievements was their research into the effect of malnutrition on mental development, based on a creative study of the Dutch Winter Famine and the children born in that period, whose mothers had suffered food deprivation<sup>100</sup>. More recently, their twenty-year-long battle against AIDS has led to a major breakthrough in which a team of their erstwhile students has shown that women can be protected against AIDS by using intra-vaginal application of anti-HIV drugs<sup>101</sup>.

Their little brother, Wilfred, married Chana Morgenstern. He is a biophysicist, author of books on transport across biological membranes<sup>102</sup> and papers on cancer biostatistics. He wrote much of the present “book”.

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.mailman.columbia.edu/our-faculty/profile?uni=zas2>

<sup>99</sup> Photograph by Paul Weinberg <http://ije.oxfordjournals.org/content/31/1/34.full.pdf+html>

<sup>100</sup> Famine and human development : the Dutch hunger winter of 1944-1945 Zena Stein and others New York : Oxford University Press, 1975.

<sup>101</sup> Effectiveness and safety of tenofovir gel, an antiretroviral microbicide, for the prevention of HIV infection in women. Abdool Karim Q, Abdool Karim SS, Frohlich JA, Grobler AC, Baxter C, Mansoor LE, Kharsany AB, Sibeko S, Mlisana KP, Omar Z, Gengiah TN, Maarschalk S, Arulappan N, Mlotshwa M, Morris L, Taylor D; CAPRISA 004 Trial Group. Science. 2010 Sep 3;329(5996):1168-74.

<sup>102</sup> Wilfred D Stein: Books (Used, New, Out-of-Print) - Alibris has new & used books by *Wilfred D Stein*, including hardcovers, softcovers, rare, out-of-print first editions, signed copies, and more. [www.alibris.com/search/books/author/Stein,%20Wilfred%20D](http://www.alibris.com/search/books/author/Stein,%20Wilfred%20D) -



*The Wilfred and Chana Stein family in the Susser's garden, September 2011 at their granddaughter Sarah's Batmitzvah party. Moshe, Aryeh, Rebecca, and Gideon behind, with their parents in front.*

## **Part six: The Lewenson family**

James and Chana Lewenson. So if this section is on a Lewenson family, where is the Rollnick? Was Chana a Rollnick? Not true, we do not have among the Wynberg clan a Chana Rollnick (or Rolnik). So why are we considering these interlopers? It is because, as we saw earlier, James Lewenson was born Chaim Rolnik, changed his name to Lewenson to hide from the Tsarist Army draft, and then Anglicized the Chaim to James when he got to South Africa. He was a brother of Wolf, and hence of Meir, and of Dov Ber, and of Johanna - all children of Yosel of Upyna.

We knew that we were related to the Lewensons but never really understood in what way, until I found Lily's notes (reproduced earlier in this chapter) which stated clearly that Lewenson was Rolnik. Once this was found, a granddaughter of James and Chana did remember that her mother had told this to her. I thought, when I finally located the Death Notice of James, that I would see that his father and mother were (like Wolf Rollnick's) Joseph and Feige Rollnick. But no, James' father and mother are given as Joseph and Fanny Lewenson. So not

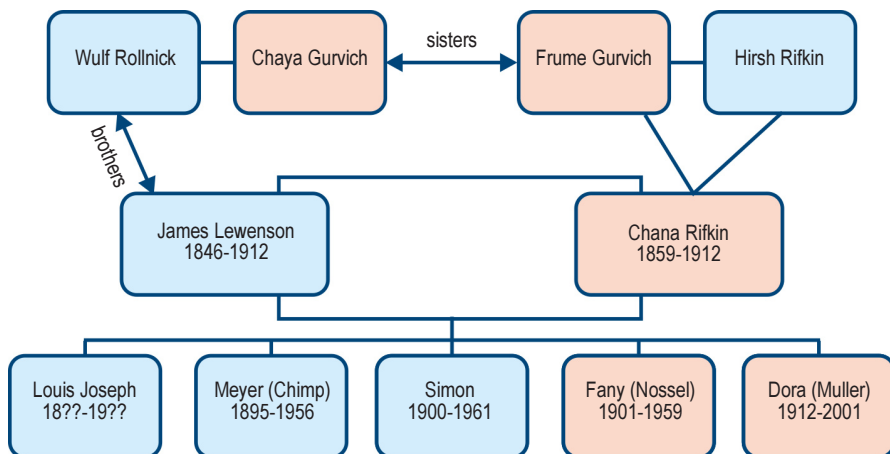
only did James change his own name from Rolnik to Lewenson to avoid the Tsar's draft, but he changed also his father's name. At least so it was written on the Death Notice (which, of course, he did not himself fill out!).



*Chana (nee Rifkin) and James (Rolnik) Lewenson*

Of course, a Rollnick/Rifkin marriage is not news to us. Victor Rifkin had married his cousin Fanny Rollnick. But Chana Rifkin and James Lewenson were not even cousins. Chana was James's niece-in-law, not a blood relation. It's probably a good idea if I reproduce here again the Lewenson-Rifkin Family Connection (next page):

## The Lewenson Family Tree



*So Chana was James' niece-in-law.*

It was Wolf Rollnick and Herschel Rifkin who had each married a Gurvich daughter. Chana Rifkin was Herschel's daughter so she was Wolf's niece (actually niece-in-law, since Wolf's wife Chaya was the blood niece). But James? He was the brother of Wolf's niece-in-law, so that's really an in-law in-law, and the marriage was thus super-legal. Besides, just look at the two of them. Wouldn't you have married the strong, fine-looking Chana<sup>103</sup> or the solid James, if you were of the correct gender?

Did you think that was complicated? Just wait. In the next generation, Chana and James's son Meyer (Chimp) Lewenson married Celia Matz, Aron and Dora Matz's daughter. Dora's mother was a Gurvich so she and Chana Lewenson were first cousins. Their children were second cousins through the Gurvich line. But James was, in truth, a Rollnick and uncle to Dora Matz. So Dora and Chimp were first cousins and hence Celia and Chimp were first cousins once removed. And also, as we saw a moment ago, second cousins!

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<sup>103</sup> A granddaughter writes: "Chana had a store in the old country and my mother told me how the Russians used to come to her store and say they were collecting taxes and take all the money from the till. She therefore kept her money elsewhere so when they came there was very little money in the till".

## Meyer Lewenson and Celia Matz

### Gurvich (Hurwitz) Line

Herschel Rifkin + Frume Chaya + Wolf Rollnick  
(sisters)  
Their children:  
Chana (m. Lewenson) Dora (m. Matz)  
(cousins)  
Their children:  
Meyer Celia  
(second cousins)

### Rollnick Line

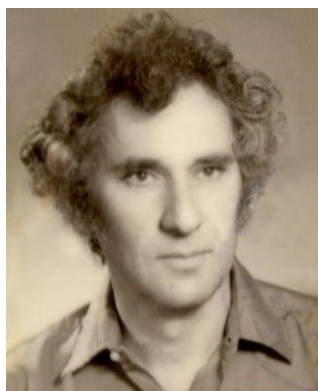
Chana + James Lewenson Wolf + Chaya Rollnick  
(brothers)  
Their children:  
Meyer (Lewenson) Dora (Matz)  
(cousins)  
Their child: Celia  
Meyer Celia  
(first cousins once removed)

Scratching my head through all this I began to wonder whether, genetically, Celia and Chimp were in fact brother and sister...or even perhaps the same person! I put the question to my mathematically-inclined children. One son's email suggested that indeed they were closer than first cousins, sort of half-siblings. But his brother did the calculation correctly. It turns out that the two of them, Chimp and Celia, shared just under 10% of their genes<sup>104</sup>, whereas first cousins share 12.5%. The result will be submitted to the London Mathematical Society.

Actually it is probably more than that "just under 10%". A number of years ago, when we visited our dear - not knowingly related - friends the Rifkinds in Rockville, Basil (sadly, no longer with us) pointed out that I looked just like his Uncle Joe Rifkind, so Joe and Wilfred, a



*Joseph Rifkind*



*Wilfred Stein*

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<sup>104</sup> As one of Lily Stein's grandsons wrote: "Siblings share 50% [of their genes] as do parents and children. For simplicity let us say Mr A is wanting to marry Ms B who is a paternal first cousin. Thus A shares 50% with father who shares 50% with brother who shares 50% with daughter B. Thus first cousins share 12.5% (1/8). First cousin once removed divides again (1/16) 6% and second cousin yet again (1/32), or 3%. Basically, count the degree of contact  $d$  and do  $0.5^d$ . If we add first cousin once removed with second cousin we get 3/32 or just less than 10%, which is less than first cousins. Not recommended but not uncommon in traditional circles".

OR:



*The same heroes, but later on in life.*

Rollnick descendant, seem to share some genes.

But, you will interject, Rifkinds are not Rifkins. Yes, but a year or two back, I got the following (very lightly edited) from one of us Rollnick descendants: "But here is another very interesting part of the story. Malcolm Rifkind, a very integral member of the Tory government, who lives in Scotland is a dead ringer for my uncle Max and uncle Hymie [see the photos on next page with Malcom Rifkind and Frank Rifkin, another Wynberg Rifkin brother] and some years ago I believe he had a huge party of all the Rifkinds to celebrate the clan! And funnily enough, one of my friends here told me that she knew for a fact that all the Rifkins worldwide are related (I do hope that excludes one Jeremy Rifkin from the States who was a murderer).. Something else so funny; I was on a tour to Scotland and amongst the crowd was a doctor who was the splitting image of my cousin Boris Rifkin, Max's son, who lives in the US. When I asked him if he had any relations called Rifkin he said yes that was his mom's maiden name. But he wasn't interested in pursuing that line as he thought that he might have a whole load of disenchanted relatives from S.A. landing on him!" So at least by visual evidence (on the surface, one might say) Rifkinds and Rifkins and Rollnicks might all be descended from some original ur-Rolkind, before the lines split up, as they wandered around Lithuania.





*Sir Malcom Rifkind*



*Cousin Frank Rifkin*

*Do they look alike - or is it just that they both wear spectacles?*

James and Chana Lewenson had five children: Louis, Meyer, Simon, Fanny (who married Joe Nossel), and Dora (who became Muller).

All were amongst the cousins of Congo Joe.



*Left to right: Meyer (Chimp), Simon, Fanny and Louis. Dora has not yet arrived*

Being his niece-in-law, Chana was almost of a different generation than James - thirteen years younger. Her last child, Dora, was born in 1912, almost twenty years after Chaya and Wolf's last child, my mother, Lily.

Like his brother Wolf Rollnick, and his nephews-in-law, Victor Rifkin and Aron Matz, James Lewenson went heavily into the property business soon after he arrived at the Cape. I have found mortgage agreements that he entered into starting in 1896 and continuing until 1903. But it is possible that he was a cannier investor than his brother and nephews, since I have not found any evidence that he, unlike them, had to go into liquidation.

I am indebted to Miriam Friedland, a granddaughter of Chana and James, for the following family history (I have made a few small editorial changes):

*"My grandfather (James Lewenson) died long before I was born. I was told he was a very learned man who studied the Torah<sup>105</sup>. I was also told that he started out as a "smous" or travelling salesman. His wife, Chana, had a grocery shop in Wynberg and worked hard there up to 11 pm. She was reportedly a very sweet and loving person but died when I was 5. Although she lived with us, I do not remember her except for what my mother told me. They lived in a flat on top of the shop where my mother worked and they had chickens in the back yard.*

*My grandparents held Shul in their home until the Wynberg Shul was built, at which time they donated their Torahs to the Shul. My cousin told me that my grandmother wrote to Palestine to order Torah covers so that the Wynberg Shul's Torahs would be especially beautiful.*

*James was a lot older than Chana. They had a house either where Maynardville is today or next to it<sup>106</sup>. At one point some anti-Semites set fire to his house. Not long after that he had a stroke which paralyzed him. (He died in February, 1912...wds).*

*The oldest son was Louis. I do not recall where he was born, but as a young man he apparently had an argument with his father about religious practices, left home and went to Johannesburg<sup>107</sup>. He died there as a young man.*

*The next in line was Meyer (Chimp) who became a pharmacist and had a*

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<sup>105</sup> In his Death Notice, his occupation is given as "Hebrew Instructor".

<sup>106</sup> From a grand daughter-in-law: "The house was in Durban Road Wynberg and they had the first shul services in their house between 1890 and 1896 before the first shul was built in 1896 in Park Road. They also had a mikvah in their house".

<sup>107</sup> On James's Death Notice, there is a penciled note "Where is Joseph Louis?". It would appear that Louis' offence was so great that he was cut out of his father's will. It must have been so sad, both for the father and for the son, that this breach remained unhealed.

pharmacy in Woodstock. His telephone number was 1. He was very bright and scored the highest marks for the matriculation exam in the Cape Province. A very kind man, my mother told me that he treated everyone, including his servants, as "though they were queens".

The third son was Simon. He was sent to Scotland to study medicine and practiced for a while. The story goes that a patient of his died and he was so upset that he gave up medicine, becoming a pharmacist. He worked in his brother Meyer's pharmacy, as did their sister Dora. Simon never married and lived with us all his adult life. He was a very religious man, led our seders and said Kiddush and Havdollah every week. He was against drinking alcohol because he grew up near a pub or shebeen and saw all the drunks. So for Kiddush he used lemonade. Actually none of our family drank alcohol other than the occasional glass of wine, and no one smoked except for my father who smoked a pipe. Simon read constantly, every book in the Wynberg library. He also read the Siddur a lot. He would sit at our dining table with 2 or 3 books in front of him as a stand for the book he was reading. He did however talk to us too while we ate.

My Mother, Fanny Lily, came next. [Fanny married Joseph Nossel..wds] She was a short woman, 5 feet in height, and was a redhead until in adulthood it turned to light brown. She was blue eyed as was Simon. She was very bright and hardworking, good natured, warm and nurturing. Fanny was always thinking of others and cared enormously for all of us. Her needs came last.

She was also an avid reader and liked historical books. She became a teacher, but she worked all her married life in her Wynberg shoe store, on Main Road. The store was part of a large building inherited from her father. My father (Joe Nossel) had a shoe store in nearby Claremont. Joe was very different from my mother and bought shoes she did not think would sell. He also bought many buildings including a Montessori School, and a vineyard in Wellington, Cape where we spent many weekends. He had big mortgages on these properties and so we lived frugally and my mother worried. She told me once that choosing a husband in those days was very difficult as most of the Jews living in Wynberg were related to each other. Since most people did not travel much at that time, the choices were limited. Perhaps that is why Meyer married someone who was



The Nossel family at Miriam's graduation,  
December 1957.

l to r : Joseph, Miriam, Fanny, Hymie,  
with,back row, Sylvia and fiance Jack Katz

*a relative in two different ways (as we saw above...wds).*

*I know my mother was regarded by many as a real Lady. She was highly ethical and never swore or cursed or had the superstitions that many had. She treated everyone kindly although she was an elitist and felt that her family, including the extended family, was of a higher status than many of the immigrant Jews in the area. She talked of her father as being a very learned man. Despite her elitism, she was pleasant to everyone and cared a lot about anyone suffering. I remember that despite her working full days in her shoe store in Wynberg, she once sat up all night with a Cape Coloured mother, whom she hardly knew, because the daughter had been diagnosed with a brain tumour.*

*My mother was religious, but not to the degree Simon was. On Sundays she cooked kreplach and tzimmes and other Jewish food. She made the most beautiful clothes for my sister and me when we were little and for my father's sister. She herself had very few clothes and she told me that when she took us out in our beautiful dresses, people would ask her if she was the nanny. She died in her late 50's, after years of heart attacks.*

*I love having her remembered in a book.*

And about Meyer, a granddaughter-in-law of James and Chana Lewenson writes: "Celia also donated the apothecary bottles and counters from the Woodstock Pharmacy to the cultural museum in town. Meyer wrote beautiful poems and loved classical music and went to the concerts at the city hall".

In the next generation, Chimp and Celia had a son, James, born after 14 years of marriage, who died young. James's widow survives him. Fanny Nossel had three children. The son, Hyman, was an accomplished medical researcher<sup>108</sup>. The two Nossel daughters, one a child psychiatrist, survive. Frieda, the daughter of Dora Muller (nee Lewenson), married into the Dembo family.

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<sup>108</sup> Hymie L. Nossel Hymie L. Nossel 1930-1983

With deep regret, The Journal of Clinical Investigation acknowledges the death on October 9, 1983 of Hymie L. Nossel, who had been a member of the Editorial Committee since May 1983. Dr. Nossel was a dedicated professor of medicine, renowned throughout the world for his research in the field of blood clotting. Fundamentals of Hematology. Richard A. Rifkind, Arthur Bank, Paul A. Marks, Hymie L. Nossel. . 158 pages. Year Book Medical Publishers, Inc., Chicago, 1976.