

Roodepoort: Greenberg Family

Pamela (Greenberg) Hayon sister of Joel Greenberg writes:

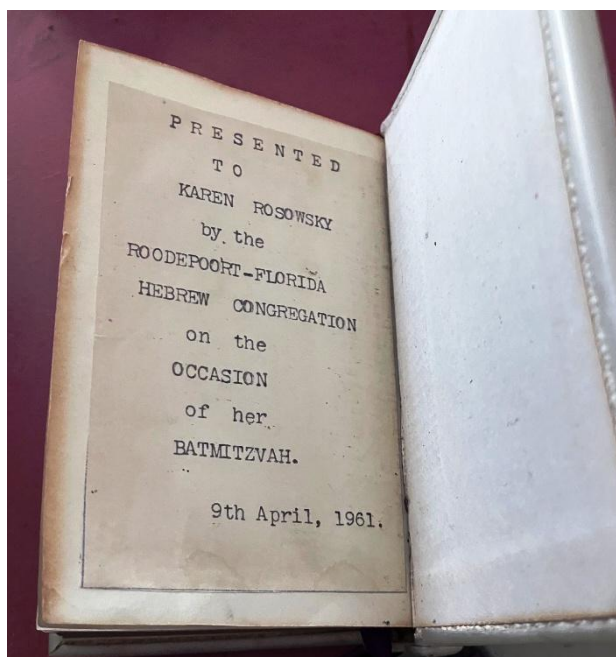
Growing up and living in Roodepoort was a privilege. An institution. We had the best town with the best people and the best community. You were welcome anywhere at any time without an invitation. We enjoyed the outdoor games; friends were loyal and there was no bullying. Teachers cared and school activities were full of fun and interesting excursions

Our grandfather **Joseph Greenberg emigrated from Odessa** and our grandmother Naomi (nee Sachs/Sacks) from Russia. They settled in Roodepoort and lived where the Savoy cinema was opposite Grey's Hotel, later Savoy hotel. These grandparents spent the rest of their married lives in Roodepoort, Joseph being a blacksmith and Naomi a seamstress. They had five children who went to school in Roodepoort. Our grandfather was buried in the Roodepoort Jewish cemetery in 1928. A recent visit to the cemetery showed it to be severely neglected and we contributed funds for the repair.

Greenberg's Outfitters

Our father Bernard (Barney) Greenberg was a clothing merchant, and **our mother Lily** worked with him in their store, Greenberg's Outfitters. Mom Lily came from Johannesburg. She served as shul treasurer for a few years. Our parents lived in Nel Street and Joel and I were born in Johannesburg.

There was a fairly big Jewish community from what I can remember with lots of children. In my childhood the Rabbi was **Rabbi Kaye** and then **Reverend Friedman**. Joel had his barmitzvah in the shul in 1961 and Rolene Benjas, Karen Rosowsky and I were the first girls in the community to have their batmitzvah together. The shul didn't change at all during my childhood and the buildings were the same.



The three girls were each given a prayerbook on the occasion of their batmitzvah – here is a picture of Karen's book and inscription.

From what I can remember it was difficult to keep kosher but there was a Spar store opposite the Town Hall and the owner Lazer Kraines kept some kosher sausages and cold meat. There may have been a Jewish family with a butchery but mostly we drove to Johannesburg to get kosher products.

I went to Roodepoort Town School then Florida Park High and left Roodepoort in 1969.

Some of the names I remember include **Morris and Becky Klein** because I played with their granddaughter when she visited from Johannesburg – her mother was Doreen who played with my aunts when they were children. The Kleins had a house behind the old CNA which later became Felix Moyes. I don't know if that is still standing. Morris was in the dry-cleaning business; he also had a concession store and was involved in property..

A reclusive Jewish bachelor, **Barney Levin**, had a concession store at the Durban Deep Mine. Mr Levin didn't come to shul or mix but my dad and he were friendly and sometimes played Klabbejas on Sunday mornings. Joel and I used to love going and tinkering around in the store, it was a treasure trove.

Morris Sewitz owned the outfitters, called **Morrie's Outfitters** as I recall; his wife was Sonia, and my dad owned Greenberg's Outfitters. Competitors? No, they were more like friendly rivals. Morrie and Sonia lived opposite us. Morrie's and Greenberg's had a different type of stock and customers. Morrie's was more conservative and Greenberg's more upbeat. We were friendly with them and often went to the drive-in (outdoor cinema) together. Sonia and Morrie were lovely people. They had a daughter Joyce who married a Jack Kruger.

In 1948, the tornado struck near the railway line and our house where my parents lived at the time was one of many that were severely damaged. My mother was pregnant with me and by a stroke of luck was at her parents in Johannesburg. The bedroom roof collapsed on her bed. I am fortunate to be here!



My grandmother Greenberg was a Sacks and her cousin Bernard Sacks ran the White Horse Inn for a long time and his daughter, Jose married a Berman and they ran it for many years. Jose Berman lives in Australia and has two children.

I met my husband Yehuda on a kibbutz in Israel. He was born in Morocco and we got married in Johannesburg in 1974. We live in Australia after 16 years on a kibbutz and have two sons, Ari and Barak, who live in Israel and a daughter Michaela in Australia. Ari is a plastics moulding designer; Barak, a water and land surveyor; Michaela is a travel agency manager and Yehuda is a boilermaker-welder.

I am retired but worked in travel for many years and then in aged care. Now I mostly read, do crossword puzzles and I am trying to make a documentary about Barney who escaped from a PoW camp in Tobruk. There is a description of the escape of Barney in a diary somewhere. But it is proving to be difficult as many records and photos were destroyed in a fire after new owners took over Barney's Outfitters.

A privilege to live in Roodepoort

Growing up and living in Roodepoort was a privilege. An institution. We had the best town with the best people and the best community. You were welcome anywhere at any time without an invitation. We enjoyed the outdoor games; friends were loyal and there was no bullying. Teachers cared and school activities were full of fun and interesting excursions. We only had a public pool and everyone played together. There was no anti-Semitism as I can recall and it didn't matter what religion your friends were. Jewish children all bonded and had fun parties after the Saturday morning service. We all wanted to go to shul. All the old haunts included the Rendezvous Café and Corner Lounge, adjacent to the Magistrate's Court; bioscopes and clubs 763 and 51 were places for teenagers to enjoy. I am in contact with many old Roodepoorters but not all Jewish but they're old school friends with the same mind-set and are my anchor.

Barney Greenberg was captured at Tobruk in June 1942. He escaped while he was being marched with other prisoners to the train station. His escape is described in the journal of a prisoner of war by Israel (Issie) Josselowitz (Joss). You can read this here. [Journal of a POW in WW2](#)

There are few records or pictures of his army career, however, and an undated press clipping from the Rand Daily Mail or the Star newspaper published a story under the headline,

"Ex-pow, Barny (sic) flies to Italy to repay big wartime "debt".

The report by the Air Correspondent reads: Forty-six-year old Barny (sic) Greenberg, of Roodepoort, will leave Jan Smuts Airport tomorrow for Italy 'to repay in some small measure a great debt' to an old Italian woman.

Signora Luigia Lertora, of the little village of San Colombano, near Genoa, who is now in her seventies, harboured three South African escaped prisoners of war for 14 months during the Second World War. She trudged with food for them through the snow of the Italian mountains in winter. She acted as a mother to them. For the last 13 years, since his repatriation, Mr Greenberg, who was one of the three, has vowed he would re-visit Italy to see her.

During his visit, he plans to take her on a fortnight's holiday "wherever she wants to go." He plans to visit all the farmers who were kind to him around Colombano.

Every month since Colombano was liberated he sent her food parcels, and telephoned her every Christmas and Easter since then but until recently he did not have sufficient money to visit her.

With him (in the mountains) were Sgt CJ Van Niekerk who drowned on the day they left their hideout to Allied lines and Sgt EJ Nel, now a head constable at Dunnottar. The two survivors reached Allied lines on 1 November 1944 for repatriation.

Mr Greenberg told the story with great reluctance. "There were plenty of others who escaped," he said. But there are few who have shown their gratitude so practically, the paper noted.

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Greenberg family story collected from Pamela Hayom née Greenberg by Brian Josselowitz, Cape Town 2019

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