



*"A Letter To My Grandchildren"*  
Pearlie Chazan



Aerial view of Upington

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## ***Index***

My Dear Children.....	5
When and Where it all began.....	7
Family.....	14
Our Home.....	32
The Furniture.....	37
The Holidays.....	43
Our New House.....	48
The Houses in Our Days.....	53
The Pont .....	58
Intresting People and Happening.....	64
Uncle Gronum Ellia Comes to South Africa.....	67
Our School and Cheyder.....	70
Social Activities.....	80
Entertainment and Abe's barmitzva.....	85
Eksteenskuil - Our Farm.....	91
My cousins.....	99
Politics and Celebrations.....	102
People.....	106
Old Songs.....	119
People and Communities in Upington.....	120
Upington Gatefold.....	129



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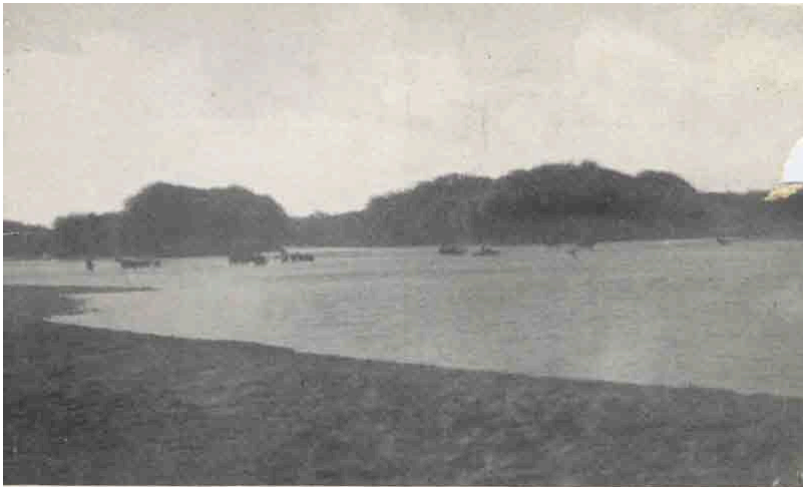
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*My dear children,*

You have often asked me about life in the “olden days” I would like to give it to you as I remember it - in a nutshell. I grew up in Upington, a small town tucked away on the north western border of the Cape Province in South Africa. It was the largest town in the Gordonia district, (so called after Sir Gordon Sprigg, the prime minister), which has the largest area and the smallest white population per square mile in the Cape Colony. Situated on the bank of the Orange River. It was originally known as Olyfenhoutsdrift because of the large number of wild olivewood trees which grew there. It was established as a mission station by Rev. Christian Schroder in 1874 to serve the indigenous Korana population as well as a large number of coloureds or “bastards”, people of mixed race who had been “exiled” from the Colony. Upington was founded just ten years later and was named after Sir Thomas Upington, the residing Attorney General of the Cape. The old mission church is now a museum with a statue of a donkey standing in front of it as a tribute to that humble animal’s contribution to the development of the district.

The Orange River is the largest river in South Africa. Its source is in the Drakensberg Mountains, which divide Natal from the Orange Free State. The river separates the Kalahari from the Great Karoo. It has huge fertile deposits of silt on its banks brought down over millions of years of heavy rains in the mountains. When one flies over the course of the river today there is a great green belt to be seen on either side, as, since the 1930's, a number of huge dams were built across the river bed, thus vastly extending land suitable for cultivation.

The entire area is a continuous belt consisting mainly of vineyards. There are many other crops as well such as lucerne, maize, wheat, fruit and vegetables, but grapes and sultanas are by far the most important. Today the wine industry there is one of the biggest in South Africa, producing high quality wines including a Kosher product, and the dried fruit cooperative company is one of the biggest in the world.



*View of the river with horses fording the drift, Upington 1914*





*My parents wedding day, Moshe Loeb  
and Sarah*

## WHEN AND WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

Uppington is 500 miles north of Cape Town, a similar distance southwest of Johannesburg and over 100 miles west of Kimberley, where diamonds were discovered in the late nineteenth century.

The Nurick brothers, Moshe Loeb and Abram, started their business in the small town of Kenhardt, when they came to South Africa shortly after the Boer War. At the time the train went as far as De Aar, so they walked with their belongings on their backs (including some merchandise) the rest of the way – about one hundred and fifty miles! They moved to Uppington a couple of years later as, with a larger population and it being located on the river, there would be far better prospects.

Our parents, Moshe Loeb Nurick and Sarah Berkowitz, were married by Reverend Bender in the Great Synagogue in Cape Town on 26th January, 1913, and after a short honeymoon in Camps Bay, took the train to the North. It took them as far as Marydale, which was the end of the line, then continuing their journey to Upington by mule cart, a distance of eighty miles. This final leg of the trip was a wedding present from Daddy's friend "Golly" Gotschalk. The railway line was later extended to include Upington during the First World War.

I never cease to wonder at the fact that, although it was early in February, and must have been extremely hot, with Mommy, who was dressed in the Victorian fashion, she never mentioned how uncomfortable that exhausting journey was.

On reaching their destination, they were welcomed by no less than seven young men – all bachelors and "boarders" of my father's. He always loved good food so had a good table, and very soon after setting up home he had gathered a "following" – he charged them one shilling per day for the service! I am not sure whether she was forewarned or not, but our Mother soon had to learn the art of catering for a crowd! However, Daddy was experienced by that time, so that helped a lot, and the



*Schroder St. turn right to the "Draai gat" 1914*

cook boy knew the ropes too, but as the kitchen had to be strictly kosher, there had to be a few adjustments and the “boy’s” knowledge of kashrut had to be brushed up considerably.

As you know, although Moshe Loeb had offered Sarah all the comforts and conveniences available at the time, she had agreed to go to that far-off place only on condition that she would be able to keep a kosher and Jewish home there.

At that time there was no spiritual leader in the town, so Daddy engaged a yeshiva bocher, named Kaplan, who then accompanied them on their journey. He would serve the Jewish community as the shochet as well as the chazan on Shabbat and all religious festivals. Unfortunately, at the time, and typical of Jews everywhere, there was a “split” in the small community in Upington so the Nurick brothers set up their own minyan with their own Torah scroll. (We were always immensely proud of the fact that it was “our” Torah Scroll.) Luckily the two parties were soon reconciled. (Many years later when the Kenhardt Shul closed, the small community there offered the Upington congregation their Torah scroll so I, with my father, grandfather and a number of other people went to the final minyan there and I was delighted when asked to act as guard - as I was sitting next to the Torah scroll on our way home.)

Many years later two beautiful silver candelabra were donated to the shul by Mr. Barney Lester. Unfortunately they were stolen and never recovered.

When we lived there, the Jewish community was nearing its peak; there must have been about seventy-five members of the Hebrew congregation. Our parents were especially anxious to maintain a religious Jewish atmosphere in our home so the Reverend would come to our home two or three evenings a week to teach us to read and write the Aleph Beth for use in both



*Motor transport, Upington 1914*



*Motor transport during the rebellion, Upington 1914*



Hebrew and Yiddish. He was always served a cup of Russian tea and biscuits, and I recall how he would put lots of sugar in his tea and slurp the syrup afterwards! As the shochet, one of his duties was to come to the private homes to slaughter – in the back yard – poultry required for Shabbat and the festivals. It was not a simple matter to have kosher chickens prepared for the table. We would like to watch as the maid would pluck all the large feathers and then singe the remaining fine ones with fire before it could come to the kitchen, be opened, cleaned and checked for any abnormalities, which might affect its kashrut.

Having gone through that process it would then be “koshered” by soaking and salting in the traditional way. Occasionally there would be whole egg yolks which we enjoyed in our chicken soup! Should it happen that for any reason we were short of kosher meat, we would order it to come by cold storage on the train from Kimberley.

Our shul was built in 1921 and in 1934 the hall was added. The hall was our “cheder” as well as the venue for prize-givings, concerts and recitation competitions, bar mitzvah and wedding receptions as well as other communal events. A special area was created to make a succah where the roof was moveable.



*Shul and hall in 1934*

The cheder was open to children from nursery school to matric. I think there were about fifty students in all. The classes were small, with my class being one of the bigger ones. We were eight – all girls – and indeed I was fortunate to have so many friends. They were Judy Blumberg, Shirley Robinson, Ruth Kurland, Alice Nussbaum, Sylvia Hummel, and Nettie and Yeta Ringer.

All of the children of the Nurick families were brought up in Upington. Our cousins were all born there but in our family, because Mommy's parents lived in Maynard Street in the Gardens in Cape Town, the three older children had been born there at the Booth Memorial Maternity Hospital, in Orange Street. Cousin "Big" Pearlie – I was "baby" Pearlie – was born in 1914 when there was a rebellion by the Boers led by Manie Maritz. As South Africa was involved in the First World War the British army then took control and all men were conscripted for civil defence! Auntie Sally and the newborn baby were taken to the English Church for safety. The wife and baby of Piet "Mof" de Villiers were also sheltered there – their baby was aptly named "Rebella" her father being one of the instigators of the uprising. (It is ironic that she grew up to marry Mr. Pope an Englishman!) Daddy together with a number of other "conscientious objectors" were arrested and spent ten days in detention – he said that they played cards most of the time!

An example of how intense the animosity between the two communities was: We had Afrikaans neighbours where the elderly grandfather, who lived in the house, never ever addressed his daughter-in-law – because she was English, and he had never agreed to the marriage in the first place!

The town was very small, consisting of about four unpaved streets parallel to the river and seven cross roads.

Within a radius of about half a mile of our house was an array of all manner of people and places. Furthest was Mr. Budler's citrus farm where the fruit was grown, graded and packed for export.

A little closer, on the northern side, was the Dutch Reformed Church( ("Dominie" Weideman), the school hostel, Budler's boarding house, the prison, the doctor (Dr. Galgut) and the magistrate's court, also the post office, the dentist (Dr. Van de Merwe), the photographer (Mr. Davies), and the original Dutch Reformed Church, "Die Ou Kerk Saal". Two banks (Barclays and Standard), a number of shops, including ours, and the pharmacy, were on the eastern side. On the west were the train station and railway cottages. The Uppington High and Primary schools, Uncle Abram's house, the English church, the Roman Catholic church, – Dr Borchers (the first doctor; later there were two more), the movie-house, two cafes, the shul, the library, the local printing press and two hotels – the Uppington and the Gordonia –were south. There were a fair number of homes, including one belonging to Piet "Mof" de Villiers.

The gravel streets were wide enough for an ox wagon to make a U-turn, but pavements were unknown. Tarmac streets came after WWII. This was the central area of the town; further afield were many other houses, buildings and a few shops.

The indigenous native and coloured population lived in "locations" which were about a mile from the town, one north and the other south, where they lived in shacks made of all kinds of discarded packing cases, flattened paraffin tins, rusty sheets of galvanised iron, reeds, in fact anything which could be used. Water for the locations had to be manually brought up from the river until a communal tap was installed when the municipality eventually brought up water for the town. The servants working in our homes lived in servants' quarters – usually a small brick room with a toilet, built in the back yard. As there were no shower or bathrooms in the early days large galvanised iron tubs were used as baths.



*My parents, Moshe Loeb and Sarah*

## FAMILY

They say that there is “mazel” in everything. Well, we were indeed lucky in every respect. To begin with, Daddy was a devoted husband and father. He was born in 1879 in Gouldingen, Latvia, and was a man who had “made” himself from the age of twelve, who had accepted the hurdles of life without question and asked for nothing from anyone. He was very proud of the fact that his mother, Pere Rifke, one of the eleven children of the Brenner Family was a Levy although we were not. After his mother’s death when he was six and Abram only three years old, he thought of himself as his brother’s care giver. They became inseparable, remaining friends and partners in business till they retired in their old age.





*Abe, 1921*



*Pearlie, 1921*



*Ada and Abe, 1921*



*Ada, Abe and Pearl, 1923*

*Sylvia, Big Pearlie  
Ada  
Phylis and Molly  
1923*



*Abe, Pearlie and Ada, 1929*



*Four of us ready for a party, 1928*

He had very little formal education, he went to cheder till his barmitzvah when, like so many other poor children, he started working in earnest. Being hard-working, self-reliant, ambitious, having much common sense and very strong principles, he prospered, and by the time he was twenty was able to immigrate to South Africa to join some cousins already there, to start a new life. His cousin Judel Brenner had returned to Latvia after establishing himself and had come home to collect his family. He had strongly recommended the move to the two hardworking, strong young men and six months later Moshe Loeb landed in Cape Town!

He did not indulge us children even though he was in a position to do so. We were short of nothing but were not spoiled; he was consistently strict but the most kind and affectionate of fathers, who would call us “mein leben” – my life or beloved ones.

Mommy was an exemplary devoted daughter, wife and mother. She was born in Lutsk in Poland in 1888, moved to London with her parents at the age of five, where she had her formal education and learned to write English in perfect copy-book script. The family immigrated to South Africa ten years later. Although I was never told why, I suspect that they



*From left to right: Pearlie, Zaida, Daddy, Abe, Fanny, Bobba and Beatrice, 1930*



*Our grandparents in London*

moved partly because a few years earlier their two babies, a girl of nine months and boy of three, had died during the croup epidemic within six weeks of each other. It was also the time of the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa and they wanted to start a new life.

She was most dutiful and long-suffering with all of us, very polite and anglicized in her manner. I never heard her say a bad word about anyone and she only saw what was good in people. She was very hospitable and tolerant. When we had a coloured builder to do some alterations to our house, she did something unheard of in those times: she invited him to have tea in our “white” dining room while they discussed details of the work to be done. She was a good Jewish mother, very Victorian in her outlook and was known to everyone as a real lady. She was strict with us and insisted on good manners and that we showed respect to others, not only our elders but also the Reverend, our teachers, the servants at home and the clerks who worked in the business.



People had “titles” - married folks were addressed as Mr. and Mrs. and young girls as Miss so and so. In our house the servants called us Miss Ada etc., and Master Abe. Our cousins were Cousin Molly, Cousin Doris Etc.

Our home was considered religious as we said our “Modeh Ani” and the “Sh’ma” every day and were proud to be observant Jews. My brother wore “Arba Kanfos”, we ate only kosher food, observed Shabbat and the festivals, and Daddy and grandpa went to shul regularly on Friday nights. On the wall were “pushkes” where, before Mommy “benched light”, we would deposit our “tsadaka”. I’m not sure why, but on the other hand we did not “bench” after meals, except on Pesach when, of course, it was part of the Seder. We never went to bed without kissing our parents and grandparents goodnight. All the adults spoke Yiddish most of the time, to keep us “in the dark” but English was our mother tongue. We all spoke Afrikaans when addressing the servants. As Afrikaans was in many ways similar to Yiddish, most of the people from Europe found it easier to learn than English.



*Fanny, Beatrice, Pearlie and Abe, 1929*



*Fanny with Spotty outside the house on the unpaved sidewalk, 1929*

Mommy had silver candlesticks, the wedding present from her parents, which Fanny has, a silver Chanukia (a gift from Uncle Gronum Ellia) which went to Ada, and the two pairs of brass candlesticks, brought from Poland by Bobba in 1892, which came to B. and I. Our samovar (subsequently stolen) the wedding present from Uncle Gronum Elia, stood on a small inlaid, rosewood corner cabinet, with a glass door, where one could see my small antique silver plated coffee set. There were many other beautiful pieces, too numerous to describe here, distributed among the family.

She was immensely proud of two urn like black vases, with birds hand painted on the sides, purported to have come from the home of Sir Rufus Isaacs, (Lord Reading - Viceroy to India in 1921) as well as two antique, ornate, blue and gold glass vases, about eighteen inches tall, which you can see in the home of Auntie Fanny's son, Jackie Katz. We also had an autographed photograph of General Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa, in recognition of a very generous donation to the Governor Generals's National War Fund during the Second World War.



*Three smart girls, 1930*

We were forbidden to disturb our parents when they slept, especially our Dad, as he would often leave home well before sunrise, sometimes at four o'clock in the morning, to go to sales or to buy livestock from the farmers. One of our farms, we had three, Eksteenskuil was cultivated whereas Swemkuil and Kopfontein, were ranches for grazing, where he went regularly to bring the food supplies for the shepherds and their families and to inspect the livestock there. He would also go to visit the "branches" of the shop to see what merchandise they needed and to pay the workers their wages, always coming home very late and exhausted.

The Cape Times was delivered to our home six days a week. Mommy would read it from beginning to end, even the legal notices and the hatched, matched and despatched columns. The paper was always two days old, as it came on the mail train from Cape Town. She had a remarkable memory and remembered all the details! She did not read many books, but found much to interest her in Pears Encyclopaedia and even the Cape Town phone book. We did not have many story books at first. I remember "The Vale of Cedars" by Grace Aquilar, "Tales of Mystery and Horror" by Edgar Allan Poe, "When we were Young" by A.A. Milne and the big Chamber's English Dictionary – but there must have been more. She was a wonderful correspondent and kept in contact with all members of the family overseas, such as Poland, Argentina and Latvia in Yiddish, and London and America in English. She supervised our homework



*Garage & S. Q. at the back of the house*

and saw to it that we practised our music lessons and attended to our extramural commitments. She taught us to sew, to use the Singer sewing machine, as well as to knit and crochet. Cooking and baking were also part of our training. In fact she constantly tried to teach us to be good Jewish wives and mothers. A true home maker if ever there was one!

Auntie Sally, who went to school in Kimberley, and Mommy were among the few English-educated Jewish parents, so were often called upon to write official letters for others in our community. Our parents were generous with their time and money and always contributed wholeheartedly to local and Zionist charities, especially when it concerned children, no matter what colour or creed.

People often came collecting. Some came for local charities and others from Israel. I remember Mr. Maisels who came from Israel who sold Yemenite jewelry as a side line which today is quite unique, but sad to say I no longer have any.

Nurick Brothers, singly or together, helped people further their education. I know of two who did very well indeed: one became a Judge in South Africa and the other a prominent orthopedic surgeon in London (Louis Solomon).

Daddy took us on outings to the farm or into the veld near Spitzkop when the flowers, mostly wild tulips, bloomed after a good rain. We would occasionally keep him company when he went into the district to buy sheep from the small farmers or to check the shepherds and flocks of sheep and herds of cattle on our farms. On one expedition, a business trip to South West Africa, being during the school holidays, he took us along to see the countryside. On our return journey, as we stopped to have a picnic lunch, literally in the middle of nowhere, we were amazed to see a very young Karakul lamb, apparently abandoned in the middle of the veld, bleating pitifully. We immediately adopted the orphan, kept it for a pet, and called it Ghandi.

I accompanied Daddy on a trip to a farmer to buy a few sheep for the butcher shop in the midst of a serious drought during the depression of the early thirties. The journey was very disturbing as we saw dozens of dead animals, both domestic and wild, in many places along the fences which barred them from reaching the river in search of water. Not only was that bad, but the farmer and his family looked starved too, and the sheep he had to offer were no better. We bought their sheep for two shillings and six pence - about twenty five shekels - each.



*An outing with Bobba, 1935*



*An outing with cousin Robert, 1935*



*With Robert and Raffi on the top of "Spitskop", 1930*



*"Spitskop"*

On another trip we slept over at the farmhouse of the van Zyl's and I can still remember the smell of the kitchen – the coffee, warming on the stove, and the dung floor.

We would occasionally go with him, for a drive, to the “slag-paal” or slaughter pole, but would always sit on the running boards of the car, far from any sight or sound of what was going on there as it was an open-air abattoir.

Originally we lived next door to the shop owned by Nurick Bros. which was situated on the corner of Scott and Hill Street, but later moved to Scott Street as the family grew.

I vividly remember an incident that happened shortly before we moved to Scott Street. Mr. Kaplan, of the Gordonia Hotel, had been for a swim in the river and on his way home had stopped for a chat with my father and had hung his costume



*Ada in matric and Fanny just  
begining school, 1934*



*Abe and Ada, “Masquerading!”- swapt  
clothes, 1934*



up to dry on the picket fence outside our home. Being an inquisitive child, Ada went to investigate and was stung by a scorpion which had somehow got into his costume. As they could be poisonous there was quite an upheaval and in years to come the story was repeated many times as a warning to all of us to be wary of insects and snakes!

We were of the first in our town to own a motor car. One of our favourite stories is that when Daddy and Uncle Abram were coming home from the farm in their newly acquired car, it stalled on the open road. It so happened that they had overtaken a donkey cart a short time before which soon caught up with them. To their amazement the driver asked them whether they had lost something and produced their petrol tank, which had fallen off! It had been secured only with nuts and bolts, and they had not been aware of the fact that they had lost it. They thanked him, replaced the tank and continued on their way.



*All of us, 1935*

Now let me give you more details of our family. First came Ada, born 5th March, 1918, then Abe, the only boy, on 1st January, 1920, after him Pearlie, 23rd December, 1921, then Beatrice, 23rd November, 1924, and last but not least, Fanny, 10th December, 1927.

Ada was clever and also talented. At school she was always near if not at the top of the class, would recite, sing and dance in the plays which were put on by the teachers and even took part in the adult plays which were produced there as no theatre of any kind existed in the entire district. She was always grown up in her ways, and she enjoyed organising, together with some friends, the younger children in the community, concerts such as *The Wedding of the Painted Dolls*. From an early age she took an interest in all matters Jewish and Zionist, she is well remembered for all she did in later years for Wizo and for the Israel Maritime League in Cape Town. Ada had seven proposals for marriage and two most ardent admirers! She was the star.

Abe, was probably lonely as he was the only boy among the eleven Nurick children – five in our family and our six cousins. In spite of this, I don't think that he was spoiled. When he was



*Wedding of Painted Dolls, 1933  
Shirly Shulman, Ronnie Robinson, Beatrice & Selma Ringer*

old enough Daddy took him along on his trips to the farms or shops so that he could learn the ropes of the business – but that was all in vain, as, after visiting Israel during the Second World War, Abe decided that he would rather come here as a “chalutz”, to build up our own country, than remain in South Africa where he would have been a big businessman. He had chosen to become a builder and had had a solid grounding in that trade. He did not approve of the apartheid system, particularly after having had a disagreement on that score with the partners, (the Nurick brothers) and having witnessed the kibbutz lifestyle here when he visited our cousins Fanny on Afikim and Minna in Binyamina. Abe was always our protective “big brother”, especially in male company! When we were young he taught us to repair punctures, to do minor adjustments on our bicycles and small electrical problems in the house, all to make us self reliant – and for which I am eternally grateful.

Pearlie, a good student -only rather talkative in school, rebellious and quick-tempered at home, was known as the “Grill” – which meant the cricket or pest. However, her saving grace was that she could fix her bicycle and punctures herself, and was the athlete in the family who could run faster than any of the others, including Abe ! To prove it I have a manicure set in a padded box – my prize in my final school year for winning the 100-yard sprint and being the final runner in the interschool relay race for girls. In my tenth year at school I needed to write a public exam which required one’s birth certificate. When we got it from the magistrate’s court we found that I had no name – it must have been because the clerk did not know how to write “Perele” and Daddy was not sure of it in English. We had to go to the lawyer (Mr. Van Copenhagen, the mayor) to make an affidavit!

Beatrice was born two months premature, weighed just four pounds and two ounces. The midwife was Sister Weich (daughter of the local post master) – who had been booked for Ronnie Robinson’s birth – was called as an emergency, and for

lack of anything better she used a shoebox as a cradle! (Ronnie was born as expected the next day). She was a placid child and Grandma told us that it was always a pleasure to have her visit them as she would sit quietly, play with her toys, not disturbing anyone. She is the cook in the family. Ever since childhood she enjoyed cooking and baking and still does. She is always looking for new recipes!

In 1924 we moved to the new house in Scott Street where we had three bedrooms, a bathroom, spare room, lounge, dining room and kitchen with a large pantry adjoining it to which a large cooler room was added as the family grew. A cooler was a large freestanding cupboard or small room, with vertical sides or walls made of chicken wire, six inches apart, filled with charcoal. Water pipes were laid on the top of these “walls” and by using the drip system to wet the charcoal, cooled the chamber by evaporation. This was our only means of preventing food and perishables from spoiling.

On the arrival of Fanny our youngest, an Irish nurse, Sister Vaugh came to live with us for a while. Fanny was a good student and a well behaved child. As a baby she had to have special attention as she was unfortunately born with a “club foot” which required surgery.

As a result my mother, with all the children, went to Cape town for six months. Where we lived in Mrs. Shure’s boarding house in Rheede Street. And i remember that Dr. Moll was the surgeon who preformed the operation. And also that, although she was only a baby, it required eighteen stitches on the back of her calf. After she was discharged from hospital Mommy would massage her little leg with Zinc ointment every night for may years. Special splints and hand made boots were required, even after she started going to school.

Fanny had an exceptionally good voice and took part in a number of stage productions and concerts. In fact she still sings in the choir of the retirement home where she still lives which gives us all much pleasure. In spite of handicap she was the best dancer in the family.

As Mommy needed to spend a lot of time at the hospital the other children had to be organized. Ada was eleven years old, was enrolled at the Good Hope Seminary in Hope Street. Abe, nine, had to be persuaded with a healthy “patz” when placed in a convent nearby, where, understandably, he felt uncomfortable with the nuns. Beatrice and I were sent to a nursery school in Kloof Street which was run by two elderly spinsters. They taught us, amongst other things, to make pompoms, which miraculously turned into baby chickens!

During our stay in Cape Town we were taken to many of the sights. We visited the museum in the Botanical Gardens where Beatrice became famous (in the family) for suggesting we “look under” when viewing the Bushmen exhibit. There was also an enormous dinosaur skeleton. We were fascinated by the Indian snake-charmer, with his live python, squatting at the bottom of The Avenue chanting “Jaldie, Jaldie”. (A friend from Cape Town tells me that he died later when it bit him.) We fed the cute, almost tame squirrels, with peanuts which we bought there from the Malay children for threepence. per brown paper packet. During the summer season many of those children would go to Muizenberg where they sold strawberries, at the same price, in little straw baskets (which they made themselves).

We were taken to see Hit the Deck at the Opera House, and I remember them singing “Sing Hallelujah, Hallelujah!” We saw Pearl Lazarus dance. I was so impressed with the finale of her show as she stepped into a large picture frame and “froze” gracefully admiring a beautiful bunch of grapes that I dreamed of becoming a dancer too. Ray de Costa was the pianist of whom the Jewish community were so proud at the time, and we were

taken to see the Cape Town municipal orchestra where Mr. Chosack (who came from England, also a resident of Shur's boarding house) was the xylophonist. We went to the beach at Muizenberg often, whenever the weather permitted even though Fanny had her leg in a plaster cast.



*Bobba with Fanny, 1932*

## OUR HOME

If I remember correctly, our grandparents, Jacob and Rachel Berkowitz, came to live in Upington permanently only after our stay with Mrs. Shure in Cape Town. They had their own house lower down Scott Street, but after Grandma had a heart attack they came to live with us and then we became a family of nine people, kein ayne hara. This was no problem for my parents who could afford servants. We had two maids, a boy and a white nanny for the children when we had a baby in the house. Yet Mommy and Grandma were kept busy attending to all the cooking, canning, mending, sewing and knitting for the family. There was never a time when there was no home-made bread, biscuits or scones, lokshen and farfel at home. Teiglach and



Kreplach or Perogen for Rosh Hashana ,Chalah (or Kitkes as we called them), for Shabat and the chagim were the order of the day. Mommy ordered the fruit for canning from Hall and Company in Nelspruit in the Northern Transvaal.

Long before the Great Depression, which started about 1929, many farmers in the country were left destitute because of Britain's scorched-earth policy during the Boer Wars of 1898 and 1902, resulting in South Africa having a very serious "poor white" problem. In order to resolve this, the Government, together with the Dutch Reformed Church, settled a large number of these poor people in suitable areas of the country, including a large area along the course of the Orange River, with Kakamas at its centre where no Jews or members of other faiths were permitted to live. Many of the young unmarried women from these smallholdings, mostly uneducated but religious, were prepared to work as nannies for the people in Upington. I remember three of them. The first was Billia Mostert, who worked for Auntie Sally, our nanny Magriet (a redhead) and Susie Poel, all very decent girls. Susie is with us on the picture taken in Muizenberg in 1928. Afterwards we had Dolly Adams, a pretty Malay girl, whose sister Agnes worked for Auntie Sally, and then came girls from the local coloured community.



*My cousin's nanny Belia Mostert, 1923*



*Two maids, 1929*

Our domestic staff consisted of a kitchen girl, an inside girl and a boy, (so-called no matter how old they were!). The boy, Barend, did all the odd jobs such as cultivating and watering the garden, which was quite big as there were at least twenty orange as well as grapefruit trees. In front of the house were three orange trees, a number of rosebushes, amaryllis, chrysanthemums, geraniums, and a grapevine which grew over an archway between the front gate and the veranda. Barend split the logs stacked in our back yard (where our little bantam hen and her chickens lived,) providing firewood for the stoves in our homes. Next to the garden in front of the main bedroom was a concrete dam of approximately four meters square which, together with two very large tanks, provided water for the household and



*Mita, 1931*

the garden. Sometimes, for exercise, Daddy would chop up the logs too!

Every morning the inside girl came in very early to get us ready for school. She polished our shoes every day and would neatly lay out our school clothes. When we came home, most probably quite grubby, we would find fresh clothes prepared for us on the foot of our beds. Washing and ironing our clothes was her duty, all wooden floors in the bedrooms were polished and the windows cleaned regularly. She tidied all the beds in the house, changed the sheets and towels every week (as a result of which I only did so myself when I came to Israel!). She also helped the kitchen girl to wash the dishes and scour the pots – of which there were many as we had three full meals every day as well as tea at eleven and four o'clock and occasionally at nine o'clock in the evening .

The kitchen girl came in at six every morning to light the fire in the stove and prepare breakfast for the family. She assisted Mommy with all the preparation of meals, making tea, as well as baking bread, cakes and biscuits, making jams and preserving fruit, cleaning and polishing the wood-burning “Dover” stove and, of course, washing all the dishes, scouring the pots and pans as well as scrubbing the kitchen table and floor every day.

All the servants would have a break till three thirty.

Our servants frequently brought their children with them when they came to work. When my brother was a young boy my father had a coloured man working for him by the name of Koos Hollenbach who would bring his youngster of about the same age to come and play with Abe. As we were ten girls in our two families Abe needed a playmate of his own gender, and they became very good friends, that is till Abe went to school. Our maid's little boy, called Bossie (because he was born under a bush), was our favourite; he came with his mother from the age of about three and must have been with us, on and off, for

a number of years. Many years later, as I was walking down Adderley Street in Cape Town, I heard someone calling my name and turned around to see Bossie! We spoke for a while and he told me that he had come to the big city to seek his fortune. I did not see him again for a long time. It was after I was married we were in Upington to attend Cousin Rhoda's wedding. We were staying at the Upington Hotel when I was called to the reception, and to my surprise there was Bossie with a briefcase under his arm, the father of a number of children and the owner of a motor car! He had come especially to show me what he had achieved since we had met – he was justifiably proud and so was I! It was from Mita that I learned a valuable lesson. I had the bad habit of throwing my clothes on the floor when I came home from school and would put on, without hesitating, my nice tidy, clean clothes from the bed -when one day she said (in Afrikaans) "Oh Miss Pearlle why do you throw your clothes on the floor and then I have to pick them up!" It gave me food for thought and I did not do it again.

As you can see, housekeeping was a full-time job those days as there were no nursery schools or electric household appliances and very few canned or ready- made kosher products. We were fortunate indeed that we could afford all the help, comforts and luxuries that we had. There were three bins in the kitchen which could hold at least 50 lbs of sugar, flour or "Boer Meal".

Daddy would bring home bushel baskets of oranges at a time and we thought nothing of consuming five at one sitting.



*Mommy*

## THE FURNITURE

Because Mommy had had a second hand furniture shop before she married, she knew much about quality, so our furniture was special. The children's bedroom furniture was made of teak wood. The dressing tables had three mirrors, a big one in the centre and two "wings" – which could be moved backwards and forwards a little so that you could see the back of your head! The wardrobe had a full-length mirror on the door. The beds had wooden head- and footboards and were well sprung. We had washstands, which had marble tops with cupboards underneath for the "potties" and our shoes. On the washstand was a very pretty ceramic pitcher and basin with a soap dish to match. Our parents' furniture was made of dark walnut and far superior to ours. The wardrobe contained three cupboards, two for hanging

clothes, with drawers underneath for shoes, and a smaller one between them, with three drawers below it. We regarded this small cupboard as very special and mysterious as Mommy kept a supply of presents there, to have them on hand whenever we were invited to a birthday party. When she opened the cupboard we would stand behind her, bursting with curiosity, as we never knew what surprising things were to be seen there. It was an “Aladdin’s Cave”. Our friends, the Kowens, told us that they always looked forward to opening the presents we brought because they were invariably the best of all.

Our dining room table, big enough to use as a ping-pong table, could easily seat ten people. If we needed to extend it there were extra leaves underneath. These could be put in by opening the table, using the special handle which turned a long screw hidden underneath the top. In winter we would usually remain at the table after supper, and play games such as lotto, drafts, snakes and ladders, dominoes and the like. As you can imagine we all enjoyed these family evenings very much, especially our Zeide Jankel when he called out the numbers for the lotto!

Radio, television, and movies were not yet known. We sometimes had visitors in the evening. The children would be called upon to perform on our musical instruments, recite or sing. No cards were allowed in the house. Once, when she was seven, Fanny innocently decided to teach our Bobba to play rummy. She had seen the game being played in her friends’ homes by their grandparents who apparently enjoyed it very much. She suggested it to Bobba, who agreed and she found a pack of cards in the tantalus (a little liquor cabinet, a wedding present – over twenty years old and still sealed), and started the lesson. By chance Daddy happened to come home just then. To our amazement, when he saw what was happening he was very cross, took the whole pack of cards, threw them in the fire and told us in no uncertain terms that it was forbidden in our home as it was gambling. We never tried it again.

The sideboard, at least one and a half meters wide, with its magnificently carved doors, beautiful gabled mirror with small brackets for special decorative ornaments, was so magnificent that people would come from all over to see it – in fact I have never seen anything like it since. The sitting-room, which we called the lounge, had a smaller table and six chairs with its own much smaller sideboard, a chaise longue, two easy chairs, the piano and the tantalus. Which now graces my lounge! Both of the sideboards, the chairs and chaise longue were beautifully carved. We used the lounge only on special occasions and most of the time the blinds were drawn. It had quite a spooky atmosphere. At bedtime, especially in the winter, it was cold and dark, so we would hurry to get to our bedrooms (with our flickering candles), as quickly as possible. It was really scary!

On the stoep were iron beds where, when we grew older, we enjoyed the challenge of sleeping outside all through the winter. We had special fur covers called “karosses” which were made of the skins of wild foxes – pests which raided farms, killing chickens and sheep. The municipal authorities paid half a crown, which was quite a lot of money those days, for each skin brought in by the local folk. In order to make the covers the skins would be cured, tanned, joined together and lined with a heavy flannel material – and very comfortable they were too.

Every summer our coir mattresses were taken apart by African women who specialised in this work. The stuffing (coconut fibre) was washed and teased and the cover washed or replaced with new striped ticking, a heavy cotton fabric. They had special mattress needles, about eight inches long, used to stitch the two sides of the mattress together to prevent the stuffing from moving.

In spite of all the help my mother had she never slept late but got up early to supervise the household. I do not remember her in bed after we were up – except once after we had had visitors



from Cape Town who stayed with us for a week. After they left she slept for twenty four hours!

Visitors, especially from overseas, were treated royally. Only the best of everything one could afford was produced. We had few such visitors. Uncle Moshe, Zeide's brother, whom he had not seen for forty five years came from London in 1933. His son, Clifford Barclay also came a few times, but much later, and Cousin Fanny Lurie, from Australia, came too. (Uncle Moshe had a lady's outfitting shop at 35, Queensway, Bayswater, London. He had two sons, Uncle's name was Moshe Berkowitz, anglesized to Berkoff, his son Isaac Berkoff, became Clifford Barclay, and Avram Berkoff became Alf Berkoff!

When our grandparents first came to live in Upington they had a house of their own. It was a semi-detached house and the Reverend Helman and his family lived in the other half. Zeida was a tailor and had a workshop set up in one of their rooms. They kept their own chickens, as we did, and had quite a big garden – roses, hollyhocks and fuchsias in front of the house, and in the back yard citrus trees. Bobba had a free standing kitchen dresser with lots of pretty miniature cups with which we loved to play. When Succot came they had a little hut in the yard with a removable roof which they used as a succah. My favourite decorations were the little "birds" which they made from eggshells. The shells were first pierced at each end and the insides blown out. The tail of the bird was a feather or two from the chickens in the yard and the head was a matchstick, the wings were drawn on each side of the egg with a crayon. To hang it up, a thread was passed through between the two holes and tied onto the palm leaves which formed the roof covering. Fruit such as oranges and lemons were also used as decorations.

My grandfather had special irons which were heated with live coals, which had to be replaced regularly, in a special little boxlike cavity, in order to maintain the high temperature – called box-irons. I am sorry that I did not keep one of them, but

I did keep his unique tailor's thimble! He was meticulous about his work and would press every seam as he made it. When we did sewing at school he was a very strict critic and would not pass any shortcuts or shoddy work. Bobba was always busy, either cooking or knitting or crocheting. She was also a keen gardener and had lovely maidenhair ferns on her stoep. I have a lot of examples of her handwork in my cupboard and also a number of her "samples" of complicated patterns. She kept us supplied with sweaters, socks and even panties!

They came to live with us only after Bobba had a heart attack. In our home they occupied a large room which had previously been our family room or "pakkamer", as we called it and there they spent the sunset years of their lives.

We had a stable and wholesome atmosphere in our home. My Dad went to the business, my mother and grandmother ran the home in the good old style. My grandfather would look after the orange trees, of which we had quite a number. He would also feed the chickens with food which he specially prepared, consisting of bran and fine lucerne. They must have been really good organic chickens!

Our neighbours, the Bersons, had two young boys, (Yudel Brenner's grandsons) Syma who could drive their "Vippet" (Wippet) at the age of six (?) and who became a pilot, and Cecil who became a lawyer they would tease the chickens, much to their delight and Zeide's annoyance, as it affected the egg production! He took a walk every morning, all spruced up in his tailor-made suit (tussore silk in the summer and pure wool in the winter), with his hat and walking stick. His suits were, of course, tailored by himself. He would visit friends on the way, especially Mr. and Mrs. Ringer, who had a shop in Schroder Street. (Their son Morris became a source of pride to us all, when during the Second World War he achieved renown as he was involved in the development of the first piece of equipment on a missile that went in to space.) He would keep an eye on the

property he owned and would do small errands for Mommy.

There was a lot of activity in the house as, being unable to get many ready-made products people produced a lot themselves. As I told you there was much cooking, baking, sewing, knitting and mending – especially of socks! Daddy would sometimes make our own polony using the cleaned intestines of sheep as “skins” and a special attachment for the mincing machine..



*Zeida going for his morning walk, 1933*

Our mother and grandmother seldom went out, but when they did, they would dress up in their best clothes. They would use their silver-chain purses and take along their engraved visiting cards because they were going visiting – and it could happen that the people were not at home! However, I do not think that the cards were ever needed, it was just a formality (something “done” in London), but they were very useful as cards for enclosing with gifts.



*Our entire family Muizenberg, 1933*

## THE HOLIDAYS

Every year, during the hot summer months we would take alternate turns with our cousins, going to Cape Town or Muizenberg on holiday. (The temperature in Upington could sometimes reach 110 degrees Fahrenheit – 43 degrees centigrade). As none of the hotels were kosher we would stay at private Jewish boarding houses. So many of the Jewish country folk would come south, that Muizenberg became known as “Jewsenberg”. Families came from far and wide, even as far away as Rhodesia and Namibia, to enjoy the wonderful climate and safe beaches.

It was a real expedition going to the Cape as we had to travel by the mail train. This meant being on the train journey for

about thirty-six hours! The train did not go straight through to Cape Town. It went as far as De Aar, which was the main junction where we would transfer all our goods and chattels to the waiting room to await the connection to the Cape – and that would always be a long wait. When we had the baby, Fanny, we took everything we required for the journey with us. A major problem was boiling water, as it was available only from the train's dining saloon or, when the train stopped to pick up or drop off passengers, from the café on the platform. Once we were delayed for some reason, and when the train came to a stop, we had to get boiling water from the engine driver as there was no saloon on that train! On that trip my mother used a cane basket as a crib for the baby. This basket consisted of two sections, one slightly bigger than the other, and was actually a type of suitcase. It was exactly the size of a pillow so it was the perfect solution. One had to use one's ingenuity when one lived in the "outback"!

When we eventually had reliable motor cars we would drive down to Cape Town. The distance was approximately 500 miles. The journey was pleasant but never very comfortable, as the gravel surfaces were very rough, and the roads were known



*On holiday in Muizenberg, 1928*

as “sinkplaat” or “corrugated iron”. Another nuisance was the gates. To prevent animals from straying between the farms, there were fences with many gates across the road which had to be opened and closed after we had passed through them. Sometimes the “Piccaninnies” living nearby would do that for us and we would give them a few coppers, sandwiches or sweets as a “pasella” or reward. Things improved a little when at some of these crossings a narrow, shallow ditch was made across the road with iron “rollers”, about three inches apart, at street level, to prevent animals from straying.

All the motor cars were open-sided with no adjustable windows. When it rained there were temporary “windows” which could be clipped onto the doors and the roof. We would travel with canvas water bags hanging on the headlamps, so cooling the drinking water through evaporation. Some luggage was piled onto the roof as the (boot) trunk was very small, and the rest sent by train. Fan belts were a problem as they often broke, causing the radiators to boil, and we would have to replace them with a raw-hide thong which we had in reserve or obtained from the ever helpful and hospitable farmers on our way. Our cars were Chevrolet - at first we had “touring cars”, and later “sedans” (which had spare wheels in the boot and roll-up windows) “Ford” were the alternative – but we believed in the “Chevy”. At that time there we also two-seaters with dickeys and motorbikes with sidecars the latter being used mostly by the police and military personnel.



*Ada with friends in Capetown, 1938 (Note the car has a Dickie)*



*Holidays in Muizenberg  
Beatrice and Fanny*



*In Caledon on holiday with Nora, 1940*





*Pearlie, Beatrice and Fanny*



*On holiday in Muizenberg with Suzie Pool, 1928*

## OUR NEW HOUSE

When we moved in to our new house we had a problem with the neighbours whose son owned a horse. The stable was about twelve meters from our dining room window – and horses and stables bring flies! At first it was not too bad, but when we extended the room by a meter and a half, and put in a large window, we were in a quandary as what to say or do without offending the neighbours. Fortunately matters worked out satisfactorily as the boy needed to sell his horse! His two sisters who had started doing dressmaking required a workroom so they decided that he should, get rid of his horse and make the stable suitable for human habitation. As a result, he had his own space, his sisters had theirs and we were rid of hundreds of the flies!

As the weather was extremely hot, in order to cool off in the afternoons, we would lie down on the linoleum floors in the bedrooms – under the beds! Showers, two or three times a day, were usual. There was a siesta time, between one and three o'clock when all shops and offices were closed. Occasionally we experienced heavy sandstorms. The sky would turn quite red, as the wind came from the desert. We would scramble to close all windows and doors and remain indoors rather than risk the stinging sand on our legs should we venture out. During the summer, there would be the odd thunder storm – the average annual rainfall being only seven inches per year. Like all the other weather conditions, these were extreme, with thunder and lightning second to none! In the winter the temperature could drop to below freezing point and burst the water pipes when Mr. Hesselman the plumber would come to the rescue. He was short and stout and spoke English with a foreign accent, I think it was Dutch or German. We would watch him through our bedroom window as he wrapped hessian around the pipes and sealed them with red lead (if I remember correctly).

We would also marvel at the carbuncles on his bald head!

Our house was very near the Dutch Reformed Church. On Sunday mornings we would sit on our veranda after breakfast and watch the people going to church. We would see the children from the school hostel walking in pairs – called a crocodile – with a teacher at each end of the line to keep order. The church had a bell in the tower which was used to summon the people to church. It seemed to sing “Sondaars Kom” or, in English “Sinners come!” We had a good view of the steeple (the tallest in the whole district), with its clock, so we could always see and hear the time! Much of the liturgy of the Lutheran Church became so familiar to me that I often hum it when recalling those days.

The prison was also nearby and we would often see the local policeman, Mr. Pheifer (with his bicycle), escorting the

wrongdoers to jail. During the night, when we slept on the stoep, we could hear the prisoners crying out loudly when the jailer meted out the lashes. From this we learned of “crime and punishment”. Mommy would hire some of these prisoners when we required extra help in our small orchard. They would come with a warder, dressed in their special prison garb, so they were easily recognisable should they, by chance, be seen at the wrong place at the wrong time. Some of the police also served in the Kalahari Desert, and, as there were no cars in the early days, they used motorbikes with sidecars, and when necessary camels, for transport. As a tribute to these police and their mounts a statue was erected in the village on the road leading into the desert.

Business improved so Nurick Bros. moved to a larger shop in Schroeder Street. They built a new building which housed the shop, a pharmacy and Barclays Bank. I liked to go to “help” in the shop. I would sit on the counter “assisting” the clerk – who at the time was a young man named Beno Jacobson – weighing small amounts of coffee, sugar and other basic needs into small brown paper packets. These would sell for three or sixpence each. We also made small pokes for sweets – very cheap ones from Algoa Sweet Works – called “Kaffir Klonkies”, which sold for a “tickey” (three pence) or less. We also sold “Nigger balls” at four for a penny, but my favourites were the “Satin cushions” which cost two pence each!

The shop was a general dealers’ store so, besides groceries we sold many other basic commodities such as calico, dress materials, socks, stockings, underwear and haberdashery, etc., as well as basic hardware and cigarettes.

Lennon’s Dutch Medicines – trusted South African natural remedies, such as “Versterk Druppels”, and “Duiwelsdrek” were in great demand. Sugar, rice, flour, mealie-meal, coffee beans and so forth came in 100lb hessian bags, some of which were sold loose, as all farmers had their own coffee grinders as well

as mincing machines in their kitchens, which were the only machines available at the time. Smaller amounts of tea and ground coffee came in one-pound tins or packets, Mazawattee and Five Roses being the most popular tea brands and Ellis Brown for coffee. Flag and C. to C. were the most popular South African cigarettes Chewing Tobacco (tabak or twak) was sold from a roll which was measured by a handbreadth or in little bags if refined. Pyotts and Beauman's biscuits were also available. In due course Rowntree, Nestle, Cadbury chocolates and much later even Cote de Or were available.

Advertising in those days was in its infancy so that in order to replenish their stocks the shopkeepers would order their requirements from the wholesalers, such as Mosenthal's in Port Elizabeth or J.W. Jagers in Cape Town. Firms such as these would send representatives, called Commercial Travellers all over the country to introduce new merchandise. They stayed in the local Hotels where they could also hire a "sample room" to enable them to display their wares such as ladies dresses and other clothing.

At the end of the block in a separate building was our butcher shop, which included a kosher section, with two butcher blocks – one kosher and one treif. I can't remember the price of beef, but mutton was threepence per pound! Once my Dad stopped the new butcher boy, in the nick of time, as he was about to stamp the non-kosher meat with the kosher stamp! Obviously he did not yet understand the importance of the rules of kashrut.

Today LSD is a drug but in our time it meant money – pounds, shillings and pence, which was the currency then in use. The coins were- farthings, halfpence and pence, "tickeys" or threepence, sixpence; twelve pence made a shilling, a florin was two shillings and half-a- crown was two shillings and sixpence, a crown was five shillings. There were twenty shillings to the pound or sovereign, and one pound plus one shilling was a guinea! You could use a gold pound – which was in daily use in

the shops – that is, if you had one!

Mommy had an open account at J.W. Jagers & Co. in Cape Town where she would obtain anything we needed. When it came to the major Yom Tovim all our requirements, such as our new outfits, mainly underwear, shoes and hats, were ordered and specified in detail. Our dresses were made by Mrs. Frick or the two sisters Kotze who lived next door. For example she would order: “a smart pair of brown shoes, size five, suitable for a girl of fifteen”. They would select – and we would accept their judgement and be satisfied with what we got. When we left home and went to Cape Town to further our education we were given permission to buy whatever we needed at Jagers, – and I can safely say that we never abused the privilege.



*The Nurick brothers staff in the shop*

## THE HOUSES IN OUR DAYS

Almost all the houses which existed in the town before we lived there did not have built-on bathrooms as people used large portable zinc baths for the purpose. We were privileged to have a free-standing enamel bathtub with “ball and claw” feet in our own bathroom. Bathrooms were built on afterwards, usually on the veranda. For our personal needs water was pumped up from the river (this was the responsibility of “Tinkie” Krail) and was stored in our small dam and two large tanks – one situated behind the kitchen and the other near the bathroom at the back stoep. To heat the water my father had a small tank built over a Dutch oven near the bathroom so, in winter, a fire was lit there every day, the ashes of which were used to scour the cooking pots and pans. In the summer we discovered that there was an





*Our back yard- the cooler under the pepper tree, the water tank and the small tank where all the mosquitoes breed. Nochamowitz and Jack Yalkowsky on he bike*

abundant supply of mosquito larvae in the tank, but that came to be very useful when we learned biology. Unfortunately it meant that we also had an abundant supply of mosquitoes! We also had hordes of flies, spiders and crickets – but we accepted the nuisance as the norm.

To control the flies, we had cartridges of sticky sweet paper, suspended from the ceiling in strategic places such as above the dining-room table, which was disturbing, but one has to pay the price for the sake of hygiene and cleanliness.

The garage, two toilets, and the servants' room were built at the rear end of the plot. We used the garage mostly as a storeroom as it was far more convenient parking the cars under the huge old pepper tree which grew outside the kitchen door.

Our toilets were of the primitive type in use those days. A water-borne system with a French drain was installed next to the bathroom only after 1939. Before we got our “new loo” we used potties at night or when we were ill. In my parents' room was a slop pail under the wash-stand. Every morning we did

our ablutions in a basin of warm water on our washstand in our bedrooms. Facilities were basic, there was no such thing as rolls of toilet paper or tissues, instead we had small pieces of newspaper, cut to size, or the soft wrapping paper from the boxed fruit, which my grandfather would thread on a piece of string to hang on a nail behind the lavatory door.

In the evenings, the three younger children, that is P., B. and F., because we bathed together, would proceed, in file, to the outside toilet. One time Fanny, who was about four, was taking rather too long on the toilet and I became impatient so pushed her so that she landed halfway into the opening of the wooden seat, resulting in her cutting her thigh on the metal shield below. As you can imagine this was far from antiseptic so I was put in the “dog box” without delay. She bears the scar to this day.

Another time, as Fanny and I were squabbling over which one of us would have the privilege of sitting in the deckchair at Grandma’s house, push came to shove, and the chair collapsed with the tip of Fanny’s finger caught between two sections of the frame and squashing it to a pulp. There was chaos, the doctor was called and I was in trouble – again!

Beatrice had an accident when she caught her finger between the cog and chain of her bicycle. She damaged her finger badly and screamed so loudly that our neighbour, Attie Lange, came running from across the street to help us, but alas the damage was done. She has a rather tough nail on that finger to prove it.

To my shame it was my fault that I teased my brother Abe to such a degree that, frustrated, he threw a stone at me, hitting me fair and square in the middle of my forehead, causing much bleeding and panic. Naturally he was punished with Daddy’s belt which made me cry even more, but somehow it made us close friends and he would always check my scar. To this day we still bear evidence of our youthful misdemeanours. In spite of all these mishaps, I think that we were good children, and we

grew up to be proud Jews and loyal citizens. All five of us made Aliya to Israel.

There was one pleasant, but dangerous escapade with no ill effects when one beautiful, sunny day we were playing ball near the little dam outside our house. Accidentally the ball fell into the dam and Ada decided that she would be able to fish it out if only an object long enough for her to use could be found. We would hang onto her legs. We found a suitable branch and helped her up. She leaned over the side of the dam – further and further – with all of us shouting encouragement. One of the maids saw what was happening and immediately called my mother, so putting an end to the fun – and the dam got a concrete cover.

After the First World War the value of the German mark fell drastically so, acting on the advice of their bookkeeper, Mr. Docker, Nurick Bros. imported a lot of goods from Germany. Besides all the goods for the shops, they included two pianos, one for each family, as well as our “washing machines”. These were the forerunners of the washing machines used to-day. They consisted of a square “bath” of approximately 45 by 45 cm with four legs and a cover of the same dimensions. A small brazier was attached underneath. In the side was an opening for a handle which turned the drum containing the washing. Unfortunately the water had to be brought by hand. A fire in the brazier could heat the water up to boiling point. The sheets and towels were boiled and then blued, using Reckitts Blue – a solid square tied in a small piece of cloth). The sheets were Horrockses linen, which, when prepared for ironing, had to be stretched diagonally by two people in order to be “square”. It was a major operation! We were more privileged than most people in having this machine, so you can imagine how difficult it must have been for those who did all the laundry by hand. Hannetjie was our wash woman who came to do the laundry once a week. Cleaning materials were soap, washing soda, caustic soda, petrol, and paraffin – and, of course, elbow grease! Detergents,

bleaches and other chemicals were still to come. once a week (usually accompanied by her young son Boesman) and to do some of the ironing which was too much for the “inside girl”. Everything had to ironed – even the underwear and handkerchiefs – (remember there were no tissues). All ironing was done in our large pantry. That was where our maids taught us to iron. Flat irons heated on the stove in the kitchen were used, which today pass as antiques and are often used as doorstoppers.



*Abe on a bike*



*Daddy and Abe Goldberg on the Pont, 1933*

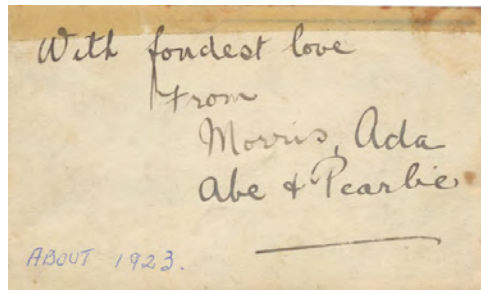
## THE PONT

Shortly after the First World War Nurick Bros. bought a ferryboat, which we called a “pont” (short for pontoon), from Mannie Holmes. I heard it said that it was a big craft, large enough to transport a wagon together with its team of oxen. Normally this ferry was the only means of crossing the river when it was full which in my mind’s eye was about 200 yards wide. I never actually saw the ferry take a wagon and team across the river but I did see it take four motor cars at one time.

Often, during the summer, in the late afternoon, Daddy would take us down to the river so that we could go across to bathe on the southern side as there was a gradual slope to the water’s edge creating a little beach that was safe for small children.

One day, when we were enjoying ourselves there, a wedding party needed to cross to the north side of the river. I think that the driver of the car must have been “under the influence” because as we watched them boarding, their car broke through the chain at the end of the platform and went straight into the water. One of the ladies in the car tried to open the door but the impact of the car hitting the water closed it on her hand and broke some of her fingers. She was taken to the doctor immediately and fortunately there were no other injuries – but it was bad enough for us to remember and talk about Dolly Faul, the lady in question, for many moons. Another time, a car broke through the chain, and went halfway into the water. My sister Ada took a picture of a crane lifting it back up. Luckily nobody was hurt that time.

*The inscription on the back  
of the picture below.  
An example of Mommy's  
hand writing*



*Ada, Abe and Pearlie on the pont with Daddy, 1923*

Gert Shreiner was the pont operator. He, a coloured man, lived with his family in a reed hut near the landing opposite the town, and was on call should anyone wish to cross the river from either bank, day or night. The “boys” would haul the pont across the water by tugging a heavy iron cable which was connected to the railing in a few places by means of wheels on one side of the platform. It was a slow and laborious process – but like so much else, there was no easier way known at the time. I remember that they tried using a large wheel with a thinner cable, which by turning it somehow propelled the pont, but I regret to say that it was not successful. Besides, as I am not qualified I am unable to describe it! It remained on board, a relic. They tried another ploy by spanning across the river, about thirty feet above the water level a light very strong cable which, in turn, was connected to the pont by another one which had a pulley running along the cable above. The theory was that the force of the current would help to propel the craft, but this was not successful either.



*The Govener General arrives and Abe in scout uniform and Uncle Abram on the left, 1933*





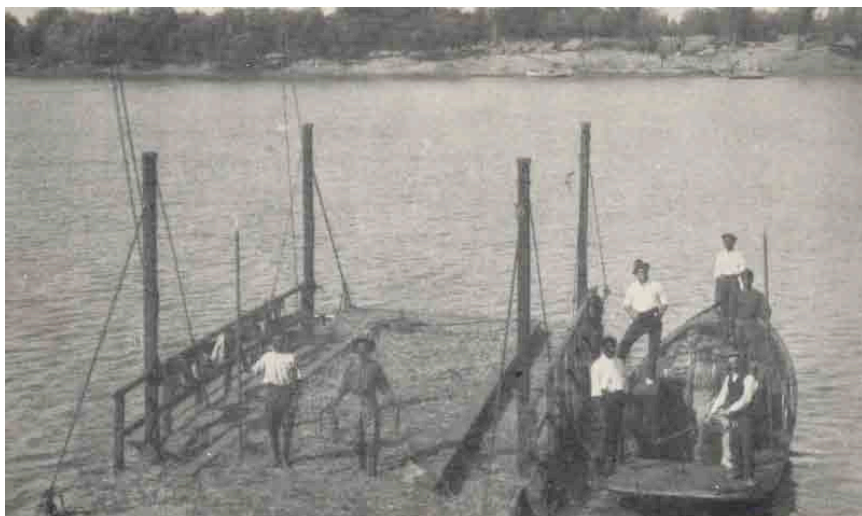
*Over the edge, 1933*

The river had a profound effect on our lives as we were well aware that so much depended on it as it provided a livelihood for all living on its banks. It was unstoppable when the heavy floods came down before the big irrigation dams were built. At those times it created havoc all the way, as happened in 1925, when, for example, our farm, Eksteenskuil (which the Nuricks had acquired in 1910), suffered massive damage. Over a thousand young citrus trees were swept away in one day, in spite of the fact that we had been forewarned and that all the farmhands and many volunteers had laboured day and night to build huge sandbag barricades. Only if one has witnessed the relentless force of a river in flood can one appreciate its power.

It was the year that the river overflowed its banks, flooding many miles of the low-lying countryside. Railway lines were washed away and the bridge was totally submerged. I was told that the river was about a mile wide at our town. Nurick Bros. were approached to bring the mail across the river and although it was very dangerous they agreed to do so. They used their motorboat, one of the few, if not the only one available in the town, the Angelina, which generally transported people or,

when the river was in full spate, acted as a “tug” for the pont. They started the crossing about a mile upstream in order to negotiate the extremely treacherous current. It was Seder night and Daddy had undertaken the mission. He had left after lunch so Mommy was very worried indeed when nine o’clock struck and Daddy had not arrived, so she went down to the landing place to wait for him, leaving her four young children sleeping at home in the care of her parents who had come to visit the family for the Pesach holidays. Thank G.... Daddy arrived safely about an hour later, understandably absolutely exhausted – and so was she as well as everyone else!

Angelina was beached after that historic event. The strain was just too much for the old boat. About fifteen years later the steel cable which had held the pont on course for so many years gave in and the pont sank. Fortunately the new road bridge was



*The east ferry (The Pont) Upington 1914*

under construction and was completed shortly afterwards, the pont was redundant and never refloated. A small car was on board at the time. My father recovered it, had it cleaned and restored and gave it to us. We called the car “Ruffles”.

In the summer, when we slept on the stoep I remember the soothing murmur of the river lulling me to sleep. When there were heavy floods most, if not all of the residents of the town would go to see all that had been uprooted and drowned by the raging waters. As I mentioned earlier, to make more fertile land available for cultivation and to prevent future disasters such as this one, a number of dams were subsequently built across the course of the river, so enabling the authorities to control and divert the water.



*Dry river*



*River in flood*

## INTERESTING PEOPLE AND HAPPENINGS

As was probably the case in most towns, we had a number of interesting people. As I think of them a picture comes out of the mist of my memories. There were two beggars of the Bushmen tribe who came regularly to our kitchen door. They were named Perebout and Ou Reitong. Both of these characters were very old – or so they seemed to us. He, Perebout, was usually clothed in old rags and, if I am not mistaken, some were made of jute bags which had been used for transporting wheat or maize, but I cannot swear to that. She, Ou Reitong, wore a very full skirt made of blue “German Print” – cotton cloth – which at that time was sold in the shops for threepence a yard. I can’t remember what else she wore but I did know that all they had were rags. They were primitive and I imagine also retarded, and she would

loudly curse and scold all and sundry on her way across the town. Even though our mother treated them kindly and would always give them food and other things as well, she never let up!

Another character in our town was reputedly a relative of our mayor – he was known as “Oom Ben”. He was mentally retarded and although so highly connected was a homeless vagrant, quite harmless, who we were told slept in the entrance to the Dutch Reformed church, where he apparently felt protected from all harm. Often, when we came home in the evening, maybe from a party or a movie, we would find him wandering around the streets. The boys with us were inclined to tease him and would ask him to dance for us, and he would. He seemed quite happy, but it was a shame that someone with his connections should be known as the village idiot. However, I suppose that, in a way, he was fortunate as we all knew him, he was free to go wherever he wished and could do whatever he pleased and that he was not confined to an institution, as he would have been, had he lived in a city.

Coming home late at night we would sometimes meet the “night wagon” ( a wagon pulled by a team of donkeys) which was a means of transporting the night soil as there was no indoor plumbing at the time. Although it was not a pleasant experience we accepted it as the norm.

In those years there was a curfew at 9 p.m. the siren would sound and all the natives would have to be out of the town and in the “Locations”. Today it seems absolutely inhuman but, sad to say, the situation was considered normal at that time – and there was a cordial relationship between the various sections of the community – but did they have a choice at the time? In the streets there was no fear and everyone greeted whoever they met, no matter their colour or creed. We never locked the doors of our house, neither at night nor during the day. In the Christmas season the young children from the locations would

come to the town, stop at intervals where there were friendly people, and sing and dance, hoping to get a reward - which they did! They called themselves the “coon-boys”. When they came to our house they would put on their “show”, dancing and singing “Talala coonboy, coonboy, coonboy”, under our old pepper tree - we would watch them through our window, and Mommy would give them their reward and they would go away happily.

One Friday night, Fanny, with three friends, was returning home after a meeting of “the Secret Seven” (her special group of friends who met in each other’s homes regularly, every week) had a narrow escape. The street was very muddy and full of potholes as it had rained heavily the day before so, to avoid the dirt, they crossed the road to a dry patch, fortunately in the nick of time, as a drunk, driving at high speed, skidded in the mud, narrowly missing them but splashing them with dirt. He, no doubt, had had a fright because he swerved, crashed into a brick wall across the road, left the car with its lights burning and the door open, and ran away. He was found by the police the next day, hiding, – over a mile away.



*3 Brothers: Moshe Leib, Gronem Ellia & Abram Nurick*

## UNCLE GRONUM ELLIA COMES TO SOUTH AFRICA

My father's brother Uncle Gronum Ellia came on a visit to South Africa just before the great depression of 1931. He was planning to go to South Africa with his wife and three daughters as his three sons, Robert, Solly and Beinis had already left. His brothers Abram and Moshe Loeb, were doing well in South Africa, life in Gouldingen was very difficult and Hitler was a "cloud on the horizon". He was doubtful about going to South Africa as he was religious and felt it was a "goyishe" or gentile world. When bad times descended on the entire world everyone was affected, money became in short supply everywhere so the plan had to be shelved. I learned later from his daughter, Fanny Shteiman of Afikim, that they had actually decided to come in spite of his misgivings, when the brothers said to put matters on



hold because their financial situation had just about collapsed. Sadly, as we all know now, Hitler soon came to power and Latvia, together with all his other conquests, was “cleansed” of Jews, and in 1941 Uncle Gronum Ellia, his wife Sara, and his daughter Leah together with most other Jews there were taken to the forests outside Gouldigen and shot. Fortunately his daughters Fanny and Minna had already left and were in Israel. Fanny had married Yacov Shteiman, and the story goes that Minna had also married but that it was a only a “marriage of convenience”, acceptable at that time, as it enabled her to get a permit to come to Israel. She was able to set up a dental practice in Binyamina, where she practiced for many years.

Uncle Gronum Ellia was a very gentle man. Once he asked us children for a glass of water . I raced off to get it and my brother did too. I got back first but Abe had brought it on a saucer and I had not. What a disaster, I had forgotten my good manners and started to cry. Uncle Gronum Ellia put me on his knee and comforted me. It is a treasured memory – he was so kind, and, remember, I was the “grill”!



*Poor relatives in Poland*

You can imagine how we felt when we realised what had happened and for a long time afterwards we looked, always in vain, for their names on the lists of survivors. There had been no news from them for so long but still we had hoped that somehow or other they would have survived.

When the situation in Europe was bad in the 1920s, I remember my parents and grandparents making parcels of clothes, wrapped in many yards of calico (which could be recycled) with the address printed on the cloth in bold letters which they sent to our poor relatives in Poland. I have photographs, usually taken at the graveside of one of them, with letters written on the back, in Yiddish. I often wonder whether any of them survived the holocaust.



*The High school teaching staff, 1937*

## OUR SCHOOL AND CHEYDER

From 1921 (when they still taught High Dutch) up until 1944 there were always Nurick children in the school – and even afterwards when Isadore and uncle Abram’s grandchildren attended!

Our school, The Upington High and Primary School, was run on the British system. In the primary school the English-medium sub-standards were combined with the standard ones under Miss Schroder, and Miss Purchase. Miss Foster taught Standard 2, Miss Maloney Standard 3, and Miss Manley Standard 4. Mr. Kennedy (“wit oog” or “white eye”, because he was so cross) took Standard 5. He was a tyrant. If he was displeased with us he would hit us across our knuckles with the

sharp side of the ruler, boys and girls without distinction. In the younger classes the punishment was standing in the corner or outside the door for the rest of the period, but in more serious cases we would be sent to the principal's office, where the boys sometimes had "cuts".

At school we used pens (but only from Standard 3) with split nibs and ink which was kept in inkwells on our desks – and made an awful mess on our hands and sometimes clothes. Bicycles, watches and fountain pens came much later. Ballpoint pens were only available after 1940.

On a lighter note, we had singing lessons! Our teacher, Mr. Grobelaar, taught us songs such as "All Through the Night" and "Once, in Marble Halls". Can't imagine anyone singing those old songs now, can you? Poems included "The Charge of the Light Brigade", "The Highwayman" etc. and in Afrikaans "Die Ossewa", "Miskiete Jag" (Mosquito hunt) and more!

In the senior school some of the teachers had nicknames, for example Mr. Coetze, "Rooimier" ("red ant" because he was so strict); Mr. Minaar, "Streep" ("Stripe" because he was very tall and thin); Mr. Van Niekerk (the principal of the Junior School), "Jai" – don't know why and Mr. Laubsher, "Gompow" (peacock) – again I'm not sure why. Mr. Sarletz was our maths teacher, very popular with all the students and my favourite. Senior School teachers were Mr. Coetzer (the principal), Dick Nel (maths), Charl Nel (biology), Mr. Liebenberg, Mr. Loubsher, Miss Leuner, Ethel Kahn, (domestic science) Miss Swarts (sewing), Mr. Oosthuizen, Mr Muller and others whose names I have forgotten.

The School hall where we had debates and competitions was built about 1933. Once A year we had athletic competitions where relay races, sprinting, long jump and high jump were the main events, after which there were rugby and netball matches when our best teams competed with those from other schools in

the area. There were also fun races like egg and spoon and the potato race.

When we studied biology, we learned about the life history of various insects and later the anatomy of locusts and frogs. We would procure large specimens of locusts, under the lamp-post outside my friend Judy's house, where they were plentiful at night, but when we needed frogs the boys in our class would catch them in the furrow near the town. These were of the variety called "Plat-annas" which we would dissect and study diligently in class. Our teachers were very dedicated. They would give us extra classes – free. During such an English class, our teacher, Mr. Coetzer our principal, was called out. He came back to tell us that he had had a message from the Station Master of the railways to say that a calf with two heads had been born in one of the cattle trucks! Would we like to go with him to see it? We did - and what a sight it was!

We had school colours and uniforms. The girls wore navy blue gym-frocks with white shirts and the boys wore grey or navy shorts also with white shirts. The school colours were orange and navy-blue, and our emblem was an orange tree with lots of leaves and fruit. The "gyms" were made of serge



*The principal at our swimming Gala  
The signaling rifle is for starting the race*

and were worn with the long black lisle stockings which were absolutely killing in the summer. We were lucky that some of us could afford gyms made of cotton fabric for the summer months, but most of the children were too poor to be able to afford two sets. Stockings were compulsory for girls in the senior school – the younger ones wore socks. We could buy badges for hats and blazers, also school ties and hat bands. Girls wore panama hats and boys wore peaked caps or cheese cutters if they could afford them. School hours were from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. in summer with two short breaks, and from 8 till 3 in winter, with a short break in the morning and an hour at noon.

There was a short period for religious instruction before school conducted by Cappy, who was also our Hebrew teacher when we went to cheder for an hour after school every day. We had “religious studies” on Shabbat when we had a children’s service in the Shul and an “Oneg Shabbat” in the Shul hall. We learned some of the liturgy which our “choir” sang in shul on Friday night, giving parents and members of the congregation a lot of “Nachas”, but annoying Reverend Helman, who banged



*School picnic, 1934*

on the lectern, as most of the choir were girls. I think that was when he resigned! Our new Reverend was Rev. Wulf, he was more accommodating and allowed us to sing in shul. He also participated in our Jewish and religious education

One of our favourite stories of our schooldays is the one about Beatrice and “Adon” Caplan. One morning on his way to breakfast at Mrs. Blumberg’s house, he saw B. rushing past on her bicycle, her hair and apron flying (it was her turn to be there early to light the fire for the cookery class). As she was known to be a latecomer, he felt sure that he was late for the Jewish prayer session, so without hesitating he grabbed his hat and coat, forgot about his breakfast and hurried to school – only to find that he was half an hour early! Arie Caplan came to us from Israel in 1933. He taught us (with much difficulty) “Sephardi” or what we called modern Hebrew, which was very unusual at that time, as well as much of the liturgy for Shabbat. He was a most kind and gentle man who was loved by all his pupils, and who, besides teaching us Hebrew, instilled in us a love of Israel, resulting, to a large extent, in so many of his



*School concert, 1933*



pupils serving in the War of Independence and many making aliya.

It was after “Cappy” and Rev. Wulf arrived in Upington that the youth formed the Young Israel Zionist Society. We had blazers, green with gold stripes. Our badge has a springbok’s head within a Magen David with the motto “Im ein ani li mi li?” embroidered on it. We were a “connected” community even though we were geographically isolated and were in close contact with other rural communities when it came to Zionist affairs.



*The Young Israel Zionist Society badge*



*Cappy our Hebrew teacher*

On Chagim, as everywhere else in the Jewish world, we would don our brand new “Yom Tov” outfits put on our gold bracelets and “Mazals” and take out our little engraved silver purses from the safe, in preparation for shul. After having breakfast of cake as a special treat, we would, with much excitement, sally forth – usually with our new shoes squeaking and often, if not always, pinching our toes. At shul there was a festive atmosphere with everyone in their finery and in serious mood, particularly on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The chazan would wear his special apparel – all white, as were the parochet and the Torah covers, which had a “new look”. The chazan would be in fine voice and the children on their best behaviour. The gabbai, together with the big donors, would sit next to the Aron Kodesh, all the men wore hats as kippot were only worn by bar mitzva boys and bridegrooms on those special occasions. On Simchat Torah the gabbai and secretary would distribute sweets; a slab of either Nestle or Rowntree chocolates to the children (we would complain that the gabbai took the rest of the box of chocolates home) and schnapps to the men, the children would be blessed under a big tallit and have flags for “Hakafot”. On Succot the shul would have a succa for the congregation. Two young boys would carry the lulav and etrog, which came from Benkenshtadt in Cape Town, from house to house to enable the mothers who were unable to go to shul to bless them. At home we sometimes made our own succa outside the kitchen.

On Yom Tov, during the break, the young people would sometimes go to the local photographer, Mr. Wilkinson, to be photographed, as they were looking their best in their Yom Tov clothes!



*Robert and friends*



*Pictures taken at the photographer during the  
break at shul on Yom Tov*

Before Pesach there was a lot of activity in our little Jewish world when all the children would be seen carrying pots and pans and everything else required for the festival, up and down between the kitchen and the garage, exchanging all the kitchen utensils from “chametzdik” for “pesachdik”, and one week later one would see them doing the same thing all over again, putting everything back! It was all very exciting – we were so busy creating the atmosphere for Pesach.

Groceries such as matzot (like cardboard) made by Cohen and Bloch, as well as other kosher le-Pesach commodities were obtained from Beinkenshtadt in Cape Town. Bobba and Mommy, together with our maids worked very hard preparing meals, as all of Nurick Bros. staff was invited to the two homes for the traditional feasts. Everyone wore their Yom Tov best and it was a festive occasion thoroughly enjoyed by everyone. Other chagim were celebrated mainly by the older, retired men and the children – especially Simchat Torah and Purim, but Shavuot principally by the children.



*School concert- Pearl the fisher maiden, 1938*

All but two of the shops, (P.J. Jacobs and Oliver and Gers, Later Bason's) in the town were owned by Jews so that on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur things were very quiet and the atmosphere was almost like Shabbat in Jerusalem. The shops were closed and nobody drove their cars. On the other hand when it came to the "Nagmaal" or communion celebrations of the Church everyone was very busy indeed. In the yards of the larger shops special rooms and bathrooms were made available to visiting farmers (as there were only two hotels), and in return they would buy all their necessities for the next three months from that store. The farmers came to town by cart or, in the early days, by ox wagon. It was only in the late twenties that a small number of cars made their appearance in Upington. "Nagmaal" is the term used for the times when the young people were confirmed in the Church (a kind of mass bar and bat mitzvah). I think that it was at those times that the women of the church would organise bazaars in the old "kerk saal". There one could buy excellent home-made articles such as sewn or knitted garments, needlework and embroidered cloths, cakes, pastry – especially Mrs. Malan's puff pastry, canned goods, preserves and, "biltong"(non-kosher, of course).



*Matric class Upington high school, 1938*



*The young crowd have a party at Judy's house*

## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

There was quite a lot of social activity, especially in the winter months when we had lots of visitors as it was the school holidays. At the children's parties we would play games such as "Pass the Parcel", "Blind man's Bluff" and "Postman's Knock" (kissing games!). There were parties for the young crowd and the Jewish Ball, which was held annually in aid of charity and which was "the event of the year". The Ball was very popular with the whole community including the non-Jews, especially as the refreshments were of the best. Before I was old enough to remember, when there was no movie house the community put on plays such as *Zurika* and *Pearl the Fisher Maiden*. My sister Ada took part in both these productions. We sometimes had fancy-dress competitions for the children to raise money for



charities. On one occasion Ada went as a “doll in a box”, Abe as a “tin soldier” and Beatrice as “Depression” – she carried a tray of mini sacks of agricultural products with tags on each showing the very low prices at the time. Sports facilities for grownups were limited with only two tennis courts, one on the market square, for members only and one, which was private, on the grounds of the magistrate’s residence. For recreation one could go to the river for picnics and swimming, or stay at home and play games such as cards – mostly rummy for the old ladies and “twenty-one” or poker for the men. I don’t think that there was anything like a golf course.

As young children we had few toys, maybe one or two dolls, and Abe had a tricycle. Daddy once brought us a miniature



*Interlude at the jewish ball, 1936*

sea grass table and two chairs, and we had dolls’ tea-sets. On another occasion Daddy brought us two little “steenbökkies” (small wild buck) which we kept in a small enclosure in front of the house for a while. On one occasion he went to a sale at the docks when on business in Cape Town, he came home with three large books: *Sixty Years a Queen* (Victoria), *The Songs of Burns* and *Portfolio of Photographs of Famous Cities, Scenes and Paintings!* Only *The Songs of Burns* was not



appreciated as we did not know much about Scotland! Otherwise we had a magnet (probably from an old car) which, when you rubbed it in the sand, would pick up minute “hairy” iron particles. We played five stones and hopscotch, and the boys played “kennetjie”, leapfrog and “slangitjie”. When we got older Mommy ordered a table tennis set and later our Tennequoits and net.

On the other hand we enjoyed the pleasures provided free by nature. We had the river, could watch the shooting stars and the moon at night as there were few street lights (and they only came after 1928), we could study the cloud formations and the insects, of which we had many varieties, such as ants, spiders, mosquitoes, bees, wasps and various kinds of beetles, locusts and even scorpions! There were birds, bats and even some snakes. We appreciated the rain and the wild flowers which were very scarce. We were true children of the Kalahari. I, for one, did not wear shoes regularly until I was twelve. However, we did wear shoes when we went to school, shul or parties (always dressed appropriately by our nanny), but as soon as we got out of the



*The Wedding of the Painted Dolls, 1933  
Produced by Ada, Nurick and Sylvia Robinson*

school grounds we would take off our shoes and socks (hand knitted by my grandmother) and run home in bare feet, ignoring the discomfort of the “dubbeltjies” (thorns) and the sandy roads. We were free! When I was eighteen, having completed my schooling, I went to Cape Town to further my education. It took me a few months to get used to wearing shoes on the hard surface of the tarred roads there.

We had a telephone installed when I was about fourteen but, before that, the children had to run errands for my mother. You can imagine how happy we were when it finally arrived. Margaret Fourie was on the manual exchange at the post office, and our number was 100. What a pleasure it was! Errands, like getting something from the shop, or taking messages to friends or relations, sprinting barefoot, from one shadow to the next so as not to burn our feet, became a thing of the past!

Before 1929 there was no electricity in the town so there were no movies, or for that matter, electric stoves, toasters, refrigerators, washing machines, irons or radios etc. Facilities were basic, which meant that a lot of manual work was needed – but then, that was life! There were no plastic articles. I think that only celluloid and bakelite were used. All parcels were tied up with string – there were no plastic plates, packets or wrapping, no Scotch tape, no strapping tape, no tea bags nor credit cards, etc. Nearly all books had hard covers. In our part of the world nylon was unheard of until 1937, as stockings were made of silk, cotton or wool, underwear from cotton or celanese, what a blessing when zips were invented!. Polyester and other synthetic fabrics and plastic industrial and building materials were in the distant future. A toaster was a long wire fork and the coals of the wood burning stove was the “element”! Watches were mechanical with a “movement”-all cogs and springs. For lighting we used candles or paraffin lamps. Electric wiring with woven cotton and asbestos covering was used as insulation. A radio was a luxury (we only acquired one in 1937), and who could imagine TVs, computers, iPhones, DVDs, cell phones or

any of the digital equipment. By the time you read this I am sure that there will be many more magical developments – as we see new inventions now, every day.

Cars had no seat-belts or any apparatus to indicate your intentions of direction - all you had to do was to put your arm out of the window and wave!

In the thirties a young married man earning thirty pounds a month could own a house and live comfortably.



*Ada and Abe on the river bank, 1938*

## ENTERTAINMENT AND ABE'S BAR MITZVA

We possessed a “magic lantern”, a projector which I think used carbide for the light, but soon electricity became available and Mr. Kangisher (whose wife made the most excellent éclairs (cream puffs), the size of a tennis ball), opened the first bioscope (cinema). To start with we had silent movies so his daughter Ivy (who subsequently married our cousin Robert) played the piano, improvising as she watched the show, providing suitable music for what was happening on the screen. You can imagine that it required much ingenuity and concentration. When sound came to the movies we got shows like *Desert Song* and *Sonny Boy* with Al Jolson, and Ivy could relax! For many years that was the only movie house. Daddy used to go very often as there was not much formal socialising; not to see the movie but to help

his friends to serve in the cafe next door during the intermission. Mommy would be supervising our homework, writing letters or reading. When people came out during the break, the Chesed family would open their shop which was across the road as there were so many customers, and Fanny would sometimes help her friend Freda there.

People in the small towns were like a large family. The Chesed family were aptly named. They lived next door to the shul hall , and were always on hand to help whenever anyone needed something, whether it was for a our cheder, a concert, a meeting or a celebration.

Till the Second World War Afrikaans acting companies, circuses and funfairs also came our way. Pagell's and Boswell's, the two circuses, with their elephants, lions, clowns and acrobats, were the most exciting. We once had a couple of Jewish entertainers who performed in Yiddish. This was very well received by all of us as ninety per cent of the Jewish population came from Eastern Europe and spoke Yiddish at home, where, in some cases, the servants learned to speak it. When we eventually did get electricity it was prone to breaks in the supply, and especially when it occurred during supper time we would chorus – “Mr. Miller, Mr. Miller!”. (He was the local electrical engineer in charge of the Power station).



*Mr. Kangisher's movie house*

Abe's bar mitzvah simcha was the showpiece of mommy's endeavours . Mommy hired the "Bioscope Hall" for the occasion and ordered many special delicacies from Cape Town. It was the first time that I ever heard of salmon mayonnaise! The floor of the hall was level and suitable for dancing so the tables and chairs were placed round the hall. The tables were covered by white damask cloths, with matching serviettes folded in a fancy pattern, decorating the tables. Mr. Lester was the chef and Mommy's chief adviser (he had been trained in England), so the menu was very special. A piano and a violin provided music, and the food and drinks ( including strong ones) were plentiful so everyone had a roaring time – with one of the men ending up under the table! It was a gala affair with most people wearing evening dress. Fanny, who was five years old, was very excited and ran around between the dancers, saying "excuse me, excuse me!" It was the party of the year!

Afterwards Mommy made a special party for her "helpers", (probably most of the Jewish ladies) as there were no caterers.

It is interesting to note that a "Waterman's" fountain pen, an ink stand or a cheque for ten shillings was a suitable Barmitzvah present at the time. Abe got a new tallit and Tephillin from our parents for the occasion. It was then the custom for all small boys to wear a Tallit, which was like a long white scarf with blue stripes and fringes at both ends.

Nurick Bros. General Dealers and Produce merchants, had a number of branches of their shop in the district. The main shop was in Schroder Street in Upington, these were at Louisvale Siding, Vaalkoppies, Karos, Swemkuil, Anna's Hoek and Eksteenskuil. At one time there was one (a partnership with Mr. Hillman) in Keetmanshoop in Namibia. In these remote places many young Jewish immigrants, many from Germany, started off their lives in South Africa. Harry Brodie, of Plate Glass and Bevelling Co., was the best known, and later one of the German refugees, Mr. Rotgieser, established Pam's, ladies'

outfitters. When these young men came to work for the Nuricks they were usually hard-up and “green” so they were happy to have employment which included a room with a kitchenette and a “boy” to help them, also whatever food they needed and a small salary – which may have been about ten pounds a month. When they arrived they were treated as honoured guests and were taken on a tour of Eksteenskuil by one of the partners and introduced to the family. As I’m the most senior of the children still alive, I have no one to consult on the details of their employment – I hope that I am correct. About 1930 the government put a stop to accepting immigrants from Eastern Europe – which meant the Jews – I think that the “Stuttgart” was the name of the last ship allowed to bring them into the country .

Not all of our clerks applied for the job. Barney Lester came to work for us because one day, as the mail train stopped at Louisvale Siding, Uncle Abram saw a steward leaning out of the window who looked Jewish. Once his suspicions were confirmed he took him off the train saying that it was no place for a Jewish boy to be, and offered him a job! He worked for Nurick Bros. for a while, and then with the firm’s blessing and having married Ray Seratzky, (who was a sister of Mrs. Phillips, their old friend from Kenhardt) he opened The Royal Cafe in Schroeder Street. The Lesters came to live next door to us, but later moved to Paarl when they sold the cafe to the Bellon brothers, so that they could live nearer to her family.

I must mention Dave Raff among our employees. I note him especially because a few years ago when I visited the Yeshiva College in Johannesburg I saw his name on a brass plaque in the entrance lobby, he being one of their original donors. I was deeply touched as he had taken over the small shop he had been managing for the Nuricks in Swemkuil and had married out of the faith. In spite of this he had not forgotten his heritage and had contributed generously to this school when approached, even though he was living far from the Jewish community and,



as far as I know, had virtually lost contact with them.

A very sad story relating to one of our employees is that of Jack Yalkowsky, who was murdered when working at Eksteenskuil. He was called out one night by two natives saying that they needed petrol. When he came out of the house they demanded money and when he refused, hit him on the head with an iron bar, killing him. When arrested one of the men turned king's evidence and the other was sentenced to death. As Jack was one of the "Ochberg Orphans" brought to South Africa after the horrific pogroms in Poland in 1921 and was unmarried, this seemed more than tragic as there was nobody to really mourn for him. He left all his worldly possessions to the Uppington Hebrew Congregation.

Occasionally there were shady dealings in the town, the knowledge of which were not meant for our ears. There was quite a lot of illicit diamond dealing as we were within the "area". I remember when a respected member of our community was caught but was able, being well-to-do, to pay a poor motor mechanic to take the rap. He was sentenced to "sit" (in prison) for a number of years. Another time the culprit – but for lesser reason – "sat" himself. The whole community were stunned and supported his wife, who took in sewing to tide the small family over the bad times. Of course, we were not supposed to know!

A similar story – though this one was from the long distant past. One of the old members of the community had come to Uppington from Europe in the early 1900s, and like many other men had left his wife and four young children there with the intention of sending for them when he was able to do so. He had established himself and had set up home - but with his housekeeper, a young coloured woman. The young men of the town got together and told him in no uncertain terms that it was immoral and that he should send for his family. I think that they made a collection in the community to help him pay for the tickets and in due course his family arrived, and soon

settled down happily in our town.

I know of two other cases of intermarriage in our community. One man married an Afrikaans girl and lived outside the and their families, town and only communicated with his brothers and their families, but to no one else. Then there was the family who lived deep in the Kalahari on a farm called “Swartmodder”. The mother was of “mixed” parentage (her father was said to have been Jewish) and the father the brother of one of the women in town. As they were people of means, and as there was no school within sixty miles they had their own teacher living with them on the farm. Their teachers, of whom there were many over the years – as there were six children, they all had Jewish names- taught them everything according to the curriculum of the time. When they were older and when transport by car became available, the youngest being about six, they would occasionally come into town and go to “Bioscope”, as we all did on Saturday night. They always sat near the screen and never spoke to or greeted anyone. They were always isolated and we felt sorry for them. The parents were married by civil law only in 1940.



*The brothers Nurick on the farm*

## EKSTEENSKUIL – OUR FARM

Eksteenskuil was the large farm on the banks of the Orange River which the brothers bought in 1910. The farm, about twenty miles west of Upington, included two small islands, Smits Eiland and Dortjies Eiland, both of which Nurick Bros. later developed, building a concrete bridge connecting them to the mainland. Previously there had been a suspension bridge which was only suitable for carrying people. After a few years the width of the bridge was extended to accommodate trucks with heavy loads. When the bridge was completed the entire cheder was invited to attend the “opening” celebration. A fresh cement section at the entrance was inscribed with the date and names of the dignitaries present. When we visited the farm about ten years ago there were still remnants of this “plaque”.

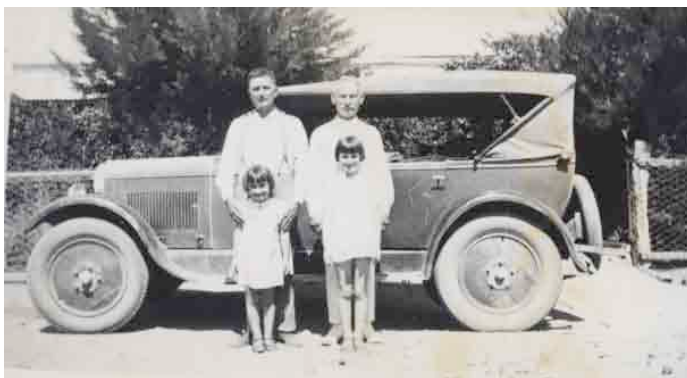
Besides Eksteenskuil the Nurick brothers had two ranches: Swemkuil and Kopfontein (where some ancient bushmen paintings were found in a cave) where sheep and cattle, were kept and fattened for the meat market. These, when ready, were taken by a herder to Louisvale siding from where they



*The farm house with the shop behind it*



*Outside the shop*



*B and I in front of the house with Daddy and Zaida*

were despatched to their destiny. The siding was a special branch of the main railway line which was used extensively, but not only, by Nurick Bros. The two large galvanised iron stores, with our name in huge letters on the side, which they built on the site remained a landmark long after our parents moved to Cape Town. For a short while we had a cow at Louisvale which provided milk for both families and the people who worked in the shop there. Daddy would sometimes milk the cow himself when his greatest pleasure was to give us this fresh milk to drink – warm and with all the froth on top!

The clerk who managed the shop on the farm lived in the house. Managing the shop included “buying” the wheat from the small farmers who lived nearby. This meant evaluating the produce which they brought according to the weight and the quality. He would extract a sample from the bag by means of a probe, which he would examine carefully for rust or other impurities. He would issue a “good-for” or receipt which would be exchanged or bartered for goods in the shop. As we had a small watermill in the farm the produce could be ground right there, on the spot. The mill was built next to the furrow where the constant stream turned the water wheel, which drove the two large stone wheels that ground the wheat. As a result we had whole-wheat flour or “boer meal” on tap, and were able to bake

*The Lucerne Harvest*



*Harvesting*

*On our bridge*



delicious “farm” bread at home, using hops and potato peelings (if I remember correctly) as a raising agent. We stayed on the farm for a week only once as Mommy was not a “farm girl”, but our cousins went more frequently as Uncle Abram was far more “the farmer” in the partnership and Daddy the shopkeeper.

In the summer, in our teens, we would go down to the river at the “Draai-gat” or whirlpool where there was a little “beach” where we would meet our friends in the afternoons and have a dip. We had a lot of fun there, especially during the holidays, even when we reached our early twenties! The school once held a swimming gala there. We often organised picnics on the other side of the river where there were better beaches, and the river was safer. I recall one when we had a “mud picnic”, something very similar to the ones we now have at the Dead Sea. Unfortunately there were frequent drowning incidents at the Draai-gat when inexperienced young swimmers were sucked under by the strong currents at the weir. Fortunately none of our Jewish community ever suffered this fate – though I know that there were some narrow escapes. We would also go fishing there in the late afternoons, but all we ever caught were barbells!



*Picnic in the mud on the Orange river, 1938  
Back row Left to right:  
Mischa, Milton, Ada and  
Hymie  
Heinz, Sylvia, Sidney  
and me*



During the winter months we would walk to Louisvale Siding, four miles away across the river where we would visit the Levinsohns, who managed the shop and who lived there. I can't imagine how they tolerated the heat, as the ceilings in their house were made of calico – under galvanised iron roofs.



*Abe on a horse, 1938*



*Ada on a horse, 1938*



*Watering the cattle at the dam*

We would entertain ourselves by going to the train station twice a week when the passenger train to Namibia from Cape Town passed through, especially when the students were coming or going to boarding school and University.



*The store on the farm*

The most popular picnic in the summer was a “watermelon feast” on the “island”. This island was caused by the river dividing into three streams near Upington as the countryside was flat for some miles and the river-bed very wide in our area. We usually celebrated the end of the school year there. We would have plenty of watermelons, would eat as much as we could, and then the fun would begin. We would “wash” each

other with what fruit was left on the peels, which left us covered with a sticky mess of watermelon juice and very fine river clay. We would come home absolutely filthy. We tried to remove most of the mud by having a quick dip in the river before going home – but it did not help very much.

Our Sunday outings often meant going to Eksteenskuil with my Dad. Although it was only about twenty miles from home, it took us about an hour to get there, as the roads were bad and the cars never reached high speeds – forty m.p.h. was racing. On our way we would sing, and Daddy taught us many songs from “home” such as “Follerie Follerah” and “Ven die Soldaten Gayen Shpatzeren”. We also sang Afrikaans songs like “Sarrie Marais” and “Jan Piet De Wit”. In English there was “Happy Days are Here Again” and “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary” and many more. After Daddy had attended to his business we would have a “braai” or barbeque and then accompany him either to see the sheep or cattle, or he would proudly show us the new crops. Sometimes we would stay at the farmhouse and play games or just relax – maybe read or, swot before exam time! The farmhouse was a five-roomed house with pomegranate, lemon, orange and grapefruit trees at the side of the house and in front a lovely Golden Shower creeper.



*The dam*

## MY COUSINS

In front of the main train station was a narrow-gauge train track just two feet wide. This was a special service to the towns of Kakamas and Keimoes which were some distance from the main line. The train which ran on this section was much smaller than the regular ones and was called the “Coffee Kettle”. Our cousins – that is the A. Nuricks – were Pearl Rebecca, Sylvia, Molly, Phyllis, Doris and Joyce. We were very close and spent most of our childhood together. They lived two blocks away in a large house. The garden had citrus trees with a special “naartjie” or tangerine tree in the middle. Pink rambling roses climbed the fence and there were beds of violets and pansies. A very large rock, about eighteen inches in diameter, unlike any other in the area, stood on the veranda and was said to be part of meteor.

As Joyce was a “chesty” child there was always smell of and Cresoline (the popular remedy for Croup) and camphorated oil in the house. The “parlour”, like ours, was always shuttered and dark, and had a glass rose bowl of many beautiful colours on their Steinway piano. Next to the big house was small one where Mr. Ramsbottom lived. He owned a large roll-top desk which fascinated me.

At the Roman Catholic Church nearby with its small school for coloured children lived a priest and three or four nuns. The children came from the “locations”, a distance of perhaps a mile or more. It was really pathetic as these children had no shoes, socks or sweaters, and it was very cold in the winter. Each child would carry a slate, a pencil and a regulation exercise book (Croxley’s). They would run past our house on their way to and from school, and, when I watched them from the security of my bedroom window, I wondered how they could bear the cold in winter or the heat in summer, as they were barefoot and so poor.



*From left to right: Sally, Abram, Bobba and Zeida, Pearlie and Sylvia, Nanny holding Doris, Phyllis and Molly, 1923*

Uncle Abram, Auntie Sally and our cousins, lived two blocks away, and we were very close to them. The six girls were: Pearlie, Sylvia, Molly, Phyllis, Doris and Joyce all of them were born between 1914 and 1927. Sylvia, aged four, was adopted when her mother, who was Auntie Sally's sister, died during the Flu epidemic in 1918. As they all lived across the road from the primary school we would go there, and auntie Sally would give us a sandwich and a glass of milk during the short break. When this was not convenient Mommy would send our "inside" maid to the school with a basket, lined with a starched serviette, a flask of coffee and sandwiches – as did some of the other Jewish mothers! I can't say that we were not spoiled a little!

Uppington was a main railway depot, and from their house you could hear and see the shunting yards where the steam engines were being serviced, especially noticeable at night when the town was very quiet. The sight of the glowing fires with people milling about checking the engines, coal trucks, the boilers etc, and the sound of all the activity was a constant source of fascination.



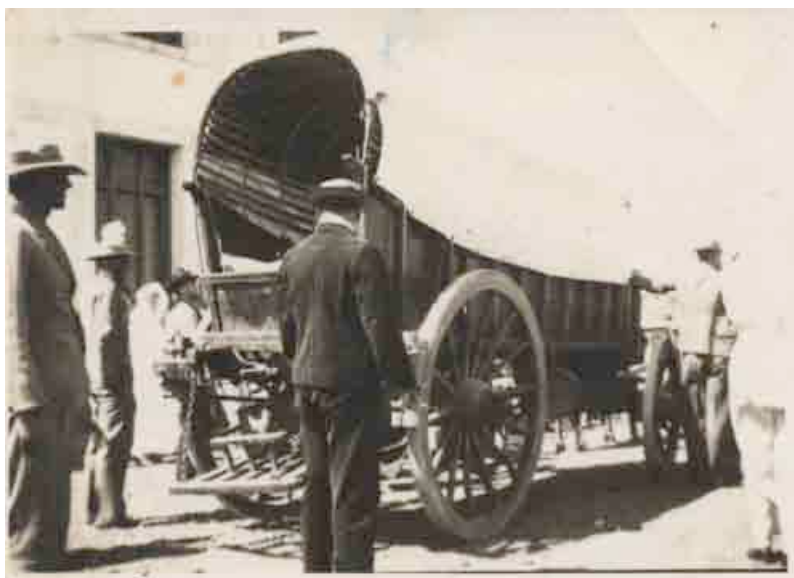
*Auntie Sally,  
Pearlie, Sarah  
Friedman, Silvia,  
Aunt Molly and  
Phyllis, 1923*

## POLITICS AND CELEBRATIONS

In 1933 there was a political crisis in South Africa. The two parties were the Nationalist Party or “Nats” and the South African Party or “Saps”. The first were mainly Afrikaners and the second mainly English-speaking and pro-British. They were usually at loggerheads but this time the leaders had decided to unite to form the United Party or “Smelters” under the leadership of General Hertzog. General Smuts, leader of the opposition, although he had been a general under the Transvaal Republic during the Boer War was inclined towards Britain, but both leaders had concluded that, for the good of the country they would join forces.



General Hertzog came to Upington to encourage his followers to join the new party, and had organized a gathering to be held in the Market Square just outside the Gordonia Hotel. However the crowd who came were staunch “Nats” and caused a commotion, with the result that General Hertzog had to beat a hasty retreat onto the balcony of the hotel, from where he could address the crowd in safety. As I was aware that this was a historic occasion I had got permission to go onto the balcony of the Palace Café, across the road, from where I could take pictures. I saw what was happening and was able to take a picture, but unfortunately I have lost it. I think that I might have given it to my sister Ada for her records when she was collecting information and pictures of the Upington community. It may be among those which we gave to the Department of Jewish Studies at the Cape Town University after she passed away.



*Centenary celebrations of the Great Trek*

In 1938, “Ossewa Brandwag” organised the centenary celebration of the Great Trek in South Africa, by retracing the routes they took. But maybe you don’t know what it was all about, so let me explain. In 1838 the Afrikaners, after much consideration, dissatisfied with British rule, decided to leave the colony and to make a new life for themselves further north in the unknown hinterland. They loaded all their possessions onto ox-wagons and with their families, together with other groups of friends, headed for the unknown. During the celebration we were privileged to have one of these wagons come to Upington. All the participants were dressed in the costume of the Trekkers and when they arrived the leaders came in on horseback. They were met by the dignitaries of the town with much fanfare and excitement. The school invited all the pupils to participate in costume so I, not fully comprehending the significance of the event, together with my two younger sisters, each carrying a large stone, as we had been instructed to do by our teachers, went to the Dutch Reformed Church. Our stones, together with hundreds of others, were piled up to be used later to build a monument to commemorate the event.



*Participating in the event in our costumes with our stones*

That evening the celebration was held out in the veld. I, the patriot, went to join in the fun, but had a rude awakening when a girl from my class asked: “En wat soek julle blerrie Jude hier?” (“and what are you bloody Jews doing here?”) I told her that I had come to represent the Jews who had gone along with the Boers, and hastily made my way home. I felt rejected, rightly or wrongly, that we Jews were not welcome citizens. The incident accentuated my desire to come to Israel.

I suppose it is normal that we had a few anti-Semitic incidents. In the early thirties Louis Weichardt organised the Grey Shirt movement, modelled on Nazi principles. They were active in the Eastern Province and the North West Cape, where they painted a huge swastika on our shul wall. In 1938 Oswald Pirow, a member of the cabinet, formed a new party, The New Order, openly pro-German, and after the war came the O.B. or “Ossewa Brandwag”, who were anti-British and campaigned for a free South African Republic.



*Mrs. Apple, 1965*

## PEOPLE

Mr. and Mrs. Apple, an elderly German couple of whom we were very fond, lived nearby. He had fought with the Boers against Britain in the Boer War, which was most unusual among the Jews. They were our good friends and our family filled a void in their lives. They had a small shop on the main road, and a nice little house with many interesting and unusual objects which they had brought from Germany. Unfortunately he was often sick as he suffered severely from asthma. After he passed away Mrs. Apple had to move into a smaller place so my mother was given some of her treasures to distribute amongst us. My mother was given a brass tray on a stand from India and each of us received something in silver – I was given a silver cake lifter, a large spoon and a silver filigree visiting-

card case. Mommy remained her good friend until our parents moved to Cape Town as Ada had become a widow. The young Jewish women in the town took care of her as she grew older, and when next I saw her, she was living in her small house but occupied only one room, having rented out the rest so as to have an income, and that was accessible only through a low window on the veranda – it was really pathetic. It truly broke my heart.

There were a few elderly gentlemen in the town. Mr. Licker (a bachelor) was a shoemaker living by himself in a small apartment which served as his home and his workshop. His hands and everything about him were always stained by dark shoe polish, yet nobody seemed to care – not even himself. The standing joke in our family is that when Ada brought home a white pair of shoes for repair – one of the heels was damaged – he returned them with a black heel, telling Mommy that he was sure that Ada would not mind, as she was not fussy! I don't know whether anyone ever invited him to their home, yet when he was not able to care for himself, the community placed him in the Aged Home in Cape Town where I visited him – all nice and clean and well cared for.

Mr. Kaplan, also single, had the printing press which published the Gordonia News. He lived in the Gordonia Hotel and only had to cross the road to go to work. With his friend Mr. Davis he would sit on the hotel stoep for hours on end watching the passing parade.

Mr. Phil Morris was the most colourful. He had come from England and lived in two furnished rooms with a bathroom, but no kitchen, which were part of a house known as the “bruidskoek” (wedding cake) house, a unique, ornate dwelling, near the Gordonia Hotel where he had his meals. We would see him, with his fox terrier “Mazel”, going to and fro at mealtimes. He was very popular with everyone as he was a very able actor and organizer of cultural functions. He would make up ditties to suit the occasion and we would all join in the chorus.

Some years after he had passed away a couple from England, probably distant relatives, came to Upington and enquired after him. Whether it was true or not I do not know, but they told us that he was a brother of Sir John Gielgud the actor, and that he had been sent to South Africa in his youth as a “remittance man”. (A remittance man was a dependent sent abroad (exiled) for reasons of health or indiscretion. [Since writing this I have done some research on Google and it cannot be true. Sorry! Gielgud’s biography says that his father was a Polish Catholic – but it is a nice story.]

Mr. Luck became our barber after Daddy nicked Ada’s ear while cutting her hair. We would go to have our haircuts regularly, in convoy, and were always impressed by his stories and the special board he would place across the arms of the barber’s chair to heighten our position.

The two bakeries in town were owned by Mr. Du Toit and Mr. Bartholomew. Bread was sixpence for a white loaf and threepence for a whole-wheat loaf. Mr. Bartholomew, whose shop was in Schroeder Street, came from Europe and was small and round. Mr. du Toit, a South African, was tall and thin, and his bakery was right next to Grandpa’s house.

There was a very nice green grocer in Scott Street by the name of Mr. Soerty who was from India. Their family were of the few educated “people of colour” in the town so were rather isolated. The other family I knew was that of Mr. Peterson the builder.

We even had a dry cleaner, Moses, a short, very dark-skinned Indian who would call at the more prestigious homes. He would take away the suits, returning them the next day, beautifully pressed and clean. I do not know where he lived or what he used, but the results were very good.

Mrs. Walker came from St Helena. She was a remarkable lady. People from that island were considered “coloured” and shunned by the white community in the town. In spite of the prejudice her two children went to our school and integrated very well. She owned a cow and would sell milk from a huge can tied onto the back of her small donkey-cart. The can had a tap and she would fill our containers using her special pint-measure. Her children were Leonard, in my class, and Agnes in Auntie B’s.

“Scotty” Smith’s grandchildren, Fred Lennox and his sister Katootjie Bokvel, were not so lucky. “Scotty” Smith was the South African Robin Hood, and although English-speaking these children were ignored by the other children in their class. They must have been very poor because they were always shabbily dressed and untidy. I don’t think that they came to the High School.



*“Scotty” Smith*

Once a week after school we had Girl Guides, Boy Scouts or Brownies, and we also had “Pinkies”. This last activity was something unique as it was an original idea of our sister Ada and her friend Gwen Fletcher (who was reputed to have been reared on donkey milk!). This group of pre-school children consisted mainly of the small Nurick girls and, a few others. We even had our own song which was composed by Ada. Brownies and Girl Guides were very popular after school. We had many picnics and camp fires and once went camping on the Biggses’ farm.



*Girl guides  
Beatrice in center  
back row and  
Selma Ringer on  
her right , 1938*



For extra-mural activities Ada and I took piano lessons with Mrs. Golightly (the wife of the local surveyor) who lived nearby, but only Ada did quite well. Abe and Beatrice took violin lessons with Mr. Pienaar, the blind church organist who lived across the road. Mrs. Stark taught Fanny.



*Girl guides picnic, 1932*

For entertainment we often needed to improvise. We used our imagination by telling stories to amuse the younger children and ourselves. When the Bellons took over the Royal Cafe it became the meeting place for all the Jewish boys and girls in the town.

The Hummels who lived nearby (Rose and Bernard- the parents were the first Jewish couple to be married in Uppington), were a happy family with seven children of ages similar to ours. Sylvia was my best friend, when she sprained her ankle I gave her a lift to school – on the back of my bicycle and later her brother took me to a party at the Railway Institute, by the same means! They were an athletic family and two of the boys, Abe and Hymie became Junior Springbok Rugby players. To go to their house we had to pass through the yard of Mrs. Cellier's boarding house. This meant that we had to "run the gauntlet" by passing the very small living quarters of Mr. and Mrs. Bezuidenhout, the shoe maker, and their son. They lived in "nagmaal kamers" which opened into the yard. The wife looked, and I am sure, was a brow-beaten woman, and the two men brazenly leered at us and made us feel very uncomfortable, if not somewhat afraid.

We always had a pet dog in the house. Spotty came to us in about 1927 and his brother Fido went to Auntie Sally. He was our faithful pet for more than ten years. I cannot conclude without telling you about him. He was a fox terrier, with a brown and black head and a big black round spot on his side. He was a very loyal dog, always playful and a good watchdog. In winter he would sleep at my feet under the blankets instead of a hot water bottle. He was becoming old and decrepit when, in spite of all our pleading, Daddy decided to send him to the farm about twenty miles away on the other side of the river. A few days later, to our great delight, as we were playing with our friends on the veranda we saw him limping through the front gate. He was wet and bedraggled with a big cut on the back of his neck and was utterly exhausted. He had found his way back

home over the open veld, had swum across the river, which is about 200 yards wide at that point, and had crawled through some barbed-wire fences, where he had most probably cut his neck. He was wet and dirty, and was bleeding so we could only attend to him after we had covered him with a towel and given him some hot milk to drink. Even then the younger children were so terrified by his appearance that they all climbed onto the table so as not to touch him – but then we all sang “For he’s a jolly good fellow” and cheered and cheered and then we all felt better – he even tried to wag his tail! After that, with much persuasion, Daddy allowed him to come home again.

In 1938 Mommy and Daddy celebrated their silver wedding. Of course the entire congregation came to wish them well but there was no formal party so I don’t remember much about it except that Daddy shaved off his mustache and our maid Mitta dropped a tray smashing some of Mommy’s best china tea set causing her to very upset indeed!



*Spotty and I, 1939*

The year 1939 was a turning point all over the world. The Second World War broke out and changed everything. As it happened that was the year that I left home, and it was when our beloved Auntie Sally became seriously ill. Uncle Abram brought the family to Stellenbosch where Cousin Pearlie lived and as it was near Cape Town there were better medical facilities. He asked me to come too in order to keep the two younger children company as he felt that they were too



*Silver wedding*

young to be involved any more than necessary with the sad situation. After a while I went to visit her and she told me that she sorely regretted what they had lost when she and Mommy had not been on speaking terms for some years. She gave me this advice – which I want to pass on to you – that it is a “crime” to waste time and energy on “fariebles” (grudges). I stayed with my cousins till after the shiva, when they returned home.

It so happened that Norah Lurie, the granddaughter of Esther Baker (Daddy’s sister), arrived in Cape Town just then. Her parents had called her to come home as she was a student at the Royal College of Music in London, when the war broke out. She was on her way home to Australia via South Africa

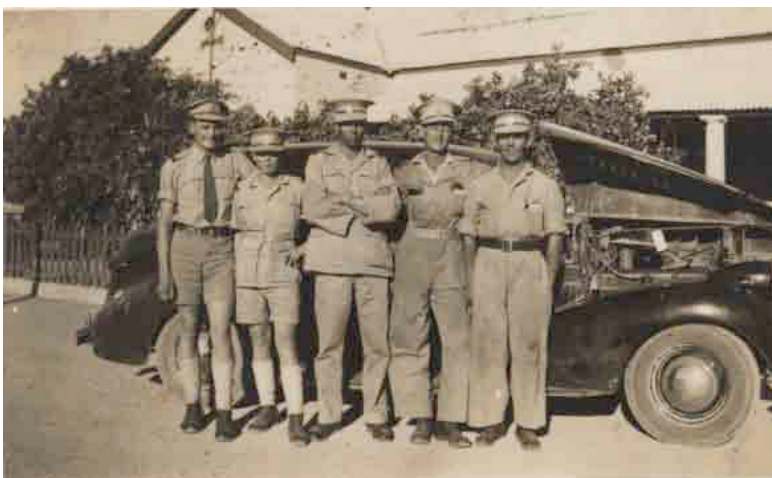
(because by then the Suez Canal had been closed), accompanied by friends who wished to spend some time in South Africa. Not wanting Norah to travel alone, her parents approached the Nuricks, with whom they had recently been in contact. Norah had competed for a bursary to attend the London Royal College of Music, but had come second and Nurick brothers had been approached to sponsor her. By this time the war was raging and they were delighted to accommodate her. Uncle Abram was on the point of returning to Upington with his children so they all travelled back together.

Naturally, because of the circumstances, Mommy took Norah under her wing. She became a hit in the village as she was very pretty and a novelty. All the boys wanted to take her to the movies. We enjoyed having Norah stay with us. At first it was very difficult for her to adjust to our life style as she had always lived in a city. Everything, especially the toilet facilities, was comparatively primitive. She practiced her music for eight hours every day – often it would be Grieg's piano concerto in A minor, which she afterwards played with the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra.

Norah liked South Africa and her parents agreed to allow her to stay on so that she could continue her studies when she was granted a scholarship at the College of Music in Cape Town. Abe, Norah and I boarded at Mrs. Cohen's boarding house in Cape Town. Norah went to College, I got my first job and Abe, who had left Umtata, found work in the building trade. The three of us lived there for some months, but Norah's folks called her home when Abe and Norah became involved! It was just as well because shortly afterwards Abe joined the army and eventually went up North for almost four years, and I went home for a few months.

Before the war Ada had gone to Grahamstown to study teaching at the Training College and was already a teacher in the Upington Primary School. Abe had been to Cape Town





*Abe with four other volunteers prior to his departure for active service in Egypt, 1941*



*Abe on active service, 1943*



*Abe with Old man Daries on his return from active service, 1945*

University to study for his bachelor of commerce degree before going into the building trade, and I was in Cape Town at the Secretarial College. It was the end of an era.

Abe enlisted and trained as an air mechanic, specialising in Dakota engines, in the South African Air Force at the base in Kimberley. After completing his training he was given home leave before being sent “Up North” to Egypt. We were all at home having a “farewell” tea before his return to base, when we were called to our back door (where all non-europeans came). We were astonished when we saw our old shepherd the “old man Daries” (there were two of them, father and the son) who cared for the flocks on Swemkuil, our ranch, which was eighty miles away. We don’t know how he knew, but he insisted that he had had a prophetic dream telling him that Abe was “going to war” and that he wished to bless him and to wish him a safe return home. Hence the enclosed picture. T.G. Abe came back safely after serving for four years. His training in the Second World War, stood him in good stead when he was one of the best Dakota Engine mechanics in the Israeli War of Independence in 1948, and was highly praised by all of the pilots, especially the South Africans.

Fifteen of the Jewish youth from Upington joined the army. They were Abe, Lyske and Hymie Hummel (military medal), Robert and Melville Kurland, Leo, Milton, Sydney and Mischa Lenhoff, Lionel Aronson, Herbert Bucheimer, Barney Kannegisser, Solly, Abe and Doris Nurick – the only girl. They and their families were blessed as they all returned home safely after the war.

Two boys from Windhoek were not so lucky – they were Effie Lenton and Jackie Brenner.

We had our share of sadness. I remember when the Dickmans lost their young son, Lionel, a child of eight or nine. It was



devastating when our neighbour and friend, Dora Kowen, mother of four young children, passed away after an operation, and later when Mrs. Bucheimer died. When Mr. Finder hanged himself we could not understand – he had three young children! It was a real blow to the family when our Auntie Sally passed away in 1939 at the early age of forty-seven. (Cousin Doris was fifteen and Joyce twelve.) Not long afterwards both Cousin Robert and Ivy passed away. Obviously our parents knew of other instances, as there are many old tombstones, some very small ones, to tell the tale. When we were at school a boy named Ashton Deroux was killed when crossing the train track. The children who lived in the railway cottages enjoyed the sport of walking in the steam of the engines in the shunting yard, which was on their way home, and he had done this once too often. It was the day of the school's annual concert dress rehearsal so all the "actors" wore black armbands when they put on their performance. There was also a case of a girl in my class, Anna van Aswegen, who was called out during class as her mother had drowned while drawing water from the river. I remember that they were very poor people who lived in an area known as "Mieliepap Stasie" where there were no taps in the shacks.

One time the news was that a woman had been arrested for murder because someone had witnessed her, in the middle of the night, throwing a heavy sack from the bridge, and which was proved to contain the body of her young servant girl who had been reported missing!

No doubt I could go on and on, but I think that this is quite enough. I said I would give it to you in a nutshell – well, it must have been some nut!

I cannot conclude without telling you that I thank Hashem every day for my good fortune in having been blessed with such a very special family, a happy youth and a long healthy life! I wish such "mazal" for all of you.

So, hoping that you have enjoyed reading all these truly authentic “bobba-maises”.

I remain your ever-loving Mother and Grandmother and Great grandmother.

Pearlie

P.S. Every day one should try to create, learn or do a mitzva, be thankful for your good luck and think of five good things which you experienced that day.

More love,

Bobba.

## Here are some of the old songs!

Ou Tante Koba sy is so dom

Sy roer haar koffie met haar groot too nom

Out Tante Koba sy is si bly

Sy het 'n nuwe man gekry!

O Brandewyn laat my staan -

O Brandewyn laat my staan

O Brandewyn laat my staan

Want el wil huistoe gaan!

Jan Piet de Wit, Jan Piet de Wit,

Jan Piet de Wit staan stil

Jan Piet de Wit, Jan Piet de Wit,

Jan Piet de Wit staan stil

Goeie more my vrou

Hier's 'n soentjie vir yo,

Goeie more my man,

Daar's koffie in die kan.

LIST OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN UPINGTON AND  
THE SURROUNDING DISTRICT IN MY TIME

The shul was. built in 1921.

BEFORE MY TIME

Brodie Harry (Plate Glass Bevelling)

Tommy Jacobson & ? – Dorothy

Lenhoff Koppel & Yetta (ex Friedman) – Sarah and Freda –  
Mavis

Marks Mr. & Mrs – Milton and Jeffrey

Miller Family

Harris Woolf – (Waverley Blankets)

Stern?& ? – Milton (Sternville)

Children who came for cheder from Keeetmans Hoop

Sirkin Morris and Louis

A family who lived on their farm

Mr and Mrs. Frankenfeld - Edith and ?

Appel William & Janette (deceased)

Aronson Lionel & Ettie - Gerald

Bailin (German refugee)

Baker Victor

Bellon Solly & Pauline – Luba and Adele

Bellon Sam & Myrtle – Roy, Irene and Elise

Bellon Maurie and Elizabeth – ?

Benjamin ? & Annie – Arthur , Stella, and Rhoda (deceased)+ ?

Berman Louis

\*Berson Barney & Tsila – Syma and Cecil

Berkowitz Jacob & Rachel.(Parents of Sarah Nurick)

\*Blum Herman & Sonia - Rosalyn and Elma

Blum Mrs ? – Max & Herman

Blumberg ? and Dora – Judy and Sammy

Brenner Leo

\*Brenner Isaac & Naomi –Judith and Shalom

Brenner Yudel & Lintza – Pola, Leo, Celia Isaac & Ruth

\*Brodie Freda & Sonny and family

Brodie Barent & Dora –Rachel, Lola, Solomon & Louis

\*Brodie Louis and –Miriam and family

Brower Charlie & ? – Hazel & ?

Brower Abram & ?– Dorothy and Sylvia

Brower Sarah

Bucheimer Mr & Rosel (deceased) – Herbert

Caplan Arie

\*Cohen (Dr.) Abe ,Sylvia –Rolene , Farrel and Marvin,

Cohen Walter (deceased) (German refugee)

Chesed Abram & Annie – Louis, Freda and Miriam

Davis Mr. & Mrs – Dorothy

Dickman Mr. & Mrs – Sylvia, Beryl and Lionel (deceased)

Druss Morrie & Fay

Dunchin Mrs.

\*Edelstein Benny & Irma – Maurice, Sephelia. Lynette

Elias Hezkia & Batsheva – Ray, Michael ????

Mr. Finder Joseph (Dec) & Mrs. – Helen, and Mildred and Jack

Frankenfeld Mr. & Mrs. – Edith and Walter.

Friedberg Herman

Geller

Gilinsky Mr. & Mrs. – Max, Solly, Milly, Annie and Fanny

\*Goldberg Harry & Bella – John and Dennis

Gordon Max

Gotschalk Gustav & Bertha.

Gotschalk – Hans and Nico, two brothers and their mother –  
(German refugees)

Hammershlach Heinz (German refugee)

Heilbron Ellis (German refugee)

Helman Rev & Mrs –Barney, Nathan and Annie

Hirshfield Barney & ? - Raymond

Hirschfield – Barney

Hoffbrand Morris & ? – Bella, Sam, Abe, Sarah (Banks) (Mrs.  
Whitehorn)

\*Hummel Abe & Fay – Esther, Jillian, Jonathan, David.

\*Hummel Lyske & Fay and Bernard, Ralene, Erica,

\*Hummel Hymie and Vera and Basil, Laurence, Mervyn

Hummel Berel & Rose – Wulf, Emily, Lyske, Abe, Hymie. Sylvia  
and Gertie

Immerman Harry & Celia –???

Jacobson Hirsh

Jacobson Leo

Jacobson Beno & Ray – Brian and Lynn

Jacobson Mr & Mrs – Leonie (Zea Lurie , niece)

Jankielson Phil

Kahn Ethel (teacher)



\*Kangisher Alec & Betty – Dora and Max

Kangisher Isaac & Betty – Alec, Barney, Dora, Ivy and Becky

Kaplan Isaac (the printer)

Kaplan Mr & Mrs – Max and Esme

Kowen Woolf & Sara – Morris, Joe, Rose and Tefke

Kowen Morris and Dora (deceased) – Hilda, Queenie, Irma and Sam

\*Kowen Morris and Becky – Dora

Kowen Joe and Dora – Julius and Ida

Kowen Tefke & Martha – David and Max

Kurland Max and Paula – Melville, Robert & Ruth

\*Kurland Melville and Ann Kurland – Norman and Maxine

\*Kurland Robert and Doris Kurland Richard, Stephen, Paula and Linda

Levin Jack and Sam

Levy Eric & Winnie – Sharon, Charles, Cecalia.

Levy Hans (German refugee)

Levinsohn Izak & Ida Abe, Anne, Maurice

Levinsohn Isaac and Fanny – Yettie and Louis

\*Levinsohn Pearl Rebecca (divorcee) - Sydney

Lenhoff Abram & Annie – Milton Mischa, Sylvia and Sydney

Lenhoff Koppel and Yettie – two daughter by previous marriage  
– Sarah and Freida Friedman.

Lenhoff Louis

Lenhoff Mendel

\*Lenhoff Milton & Yettie – Bramie and Robyn

Lenhoff Solomon & Mary – Bella, Herta and Leo

\*Lewis Maurice & Herta –

Lester Barney & Ray

Lowenberg Abram & Liebe – Dave and ?

\*Lowenberg Dave and Eva - Esme

Mr. Licker

Mandelkorn Mr. Katy – Abe, Max, Lena, Katy

Mr. Markusa Leopold

\*Mendelson Frank & Elma –Lara and Albert

Morris Phil

Newman Monty

Nochamowitz Issy

Nurick Abram & Sally (deceased) – Pearl Rebecca, Sylvia, Molly,  
Phyllis, Doris and Joyce

\*Nurick Abram & Zara – Isadore

\*Nurick Isadore & Irene – Avron and Cheryl and David

Nurick Beinis & Vera – Ghitah and Graham

Nurick Morris and Sarah – Ada, Abe, Pearlie, Beatrice and Fanny

Nurick Robert & Ivy

Nurick Solly

Nussbaum Mr and Mrs – Alice

Oppenheimer Julias (German refugee)

Rabkin Tefke & Paula – Zelic and Iza

\*Rabkin Iza & Freda – Tracy and Brian

Rachman Rev. Z.

Raff David – Married out of the faith

Ringer Harry & Becky – Yeta, Nettie, Maurice and Selma

Robinson Chatzke & Fanny – Sylvia, Isadore, Shirley and Ronnie

\*Robinson Ronnie & Esme - ?

Robinson Willie

\*Rosman Abe & Joyce – Shiela, David and Lanie

Routgisser – Hans and Walter – two brothers (German refugees)

Routkopf – Z.

Rothschild ? (German refugee)

Scharf Benno.

\*Schatz Joe & Sylvia – Allan, Simon , Ryna Mark.

Shenker Maurice (married Hilda Kowen later)

Shulman Malke (widow) – Janie, Abe, Louis, Shirley and Ralph

Speir Mr. & Mrs – Anthony and Barbara

Stern ? (German refugee)

Straus (German refugee)

Susskind Max

\*Traub Alec & Doris – Barbara, Cynthia, Maureen and Cedric  
(deceased )

Wasserman Morris & Mrs.

Weinberg Mr.

Weinreich Mr & Mrs

Werbelloff Sam & Teresa – Joyce and Leonora.

Werbelloff Solly

Wulf Berel & Molly – Sally and Rhoda

Wulf Isaac

Yalkowsky Jack (was murdered)

Zacks Julius

Zacks Simon & Girlie – John, Ronnie, Peter, and twin Arthur  
and Arnold

Zalmanson (German refugee).

From Keimoes – a hamlet near Upington

Miller Mr. & Mrs. - ??

Solomon Solly & ? – Arnold and Louis

\*indicates those “children” who remained in Upington after they were married.

E.& O.E. P. Chazan.



## The Kalahari

In this vast national park of over a million hectares one can watch herds of gemsbok, springbok, eland, rooi hartbeest and blue wildebeest graze against the red sand dunes or relaxing in the shade of the camel thorn trees. You will also see lion, cheetahs, ostriches and even camels, descended from those used for police patrols in the early days.















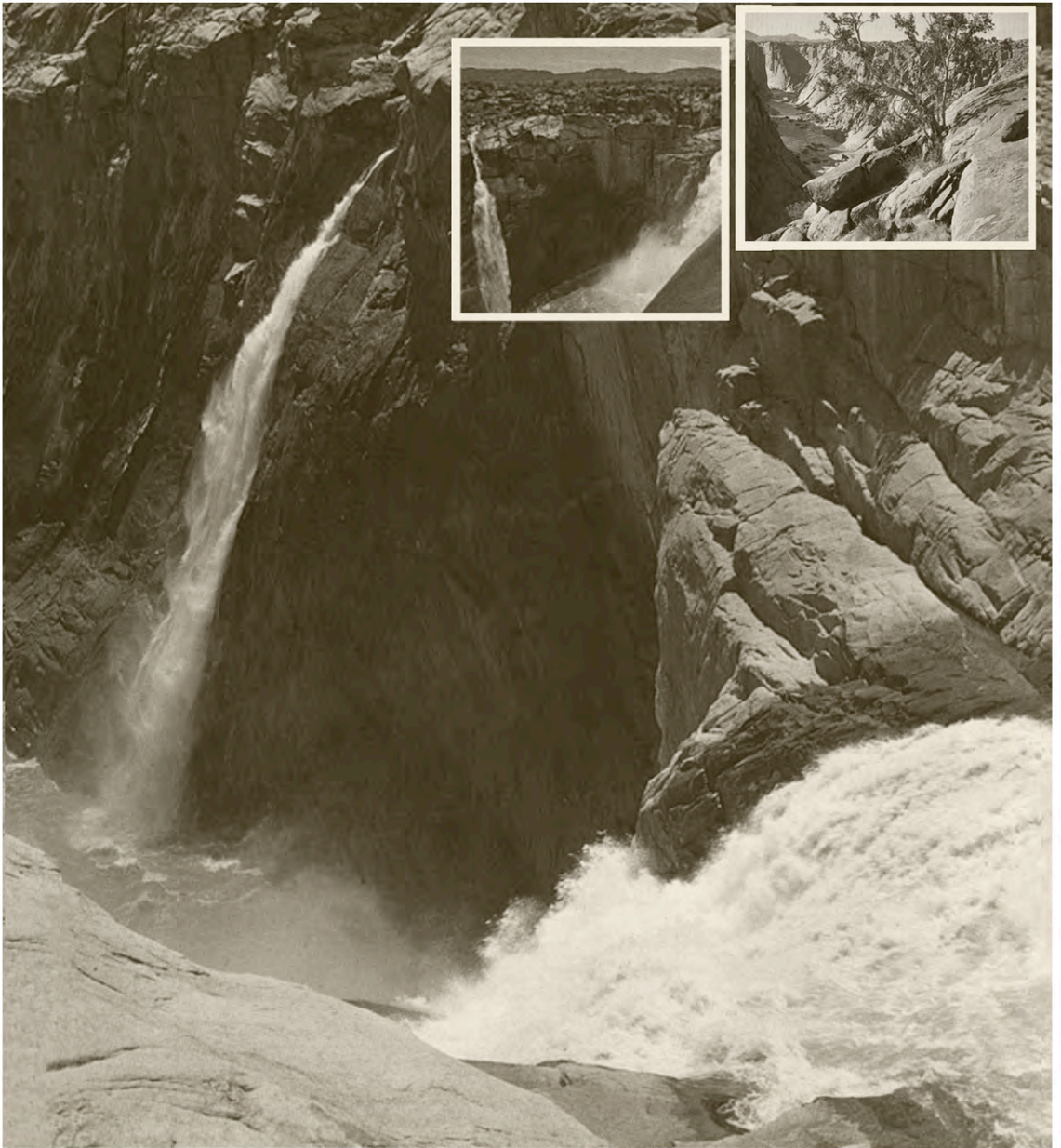


### The Upington district

Pioneer settlers were quick to utilize the vast irrigation possibilities along the Orange. Some of their first irrigation canals, built by hand, are still in use today.







### Augrabies Falls

Within easy reach of Upington lies the mighty Augrabies Falls, one of the world's greatest water falls. Here the water has cut a path through a mass of granite rock and thunders down a gigantic gorge with a breathtaking force. The wandering Khoikhoi (Bushmen) called it Aukoerebis - place of great noise.



"You have often asked me about life in the "olden days" I would like to give it to you as I remember it - in a nutshell. I grew up in Upington, a small town tucked away on the north western border of the Cape Province in South Africa. It was the largest town in the Gordonia district, (so called after Sir Gordon Sprigg, the prime minister), which has the largest area and the smallest white population per square mile in the Cape Colony. Situated on the bank of the Orange River....."

December 2011