

# CHOL – Community History On-Line

A forum for those involved in preserving the footprint of Southern African Jewish community life in digital form

## Community History On-Line CHOL Newsletter #25 February '26

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**Gail Loon Lustig writes this month:**

Dear Friends

It is hard to believe that it's February 2026 already! This CHOL Newsletter is a little overdue. It's taken a bit longer than usual to raise the curtain onto the empty stage of a New Year!

Yes, for me, living in Israel, and being able to carefully remove the dusty yellow ribbons from all the places we'd tied them, the origami yellow cranes that hung from the stair railings outside our apartment door and the ribbon Emoji from my WhatsApp messages, has been such a relief.

With it, comes the challenge of planning, initiating and moving on after the two- and a-bit year stretch of emotionally trying days, to put it mildly. The world in general has become a pretty scandalous place with sensationalism and flashing headlines coming and going faster than anyone might have imagined!

Personally, the past year was definitely eased by focussing on reading and writing and I'd like to tell you of a terrific treat I experienced being part of a writing group course which after it ended, spilled over into meeting for zoom sessions every 3 weeks when we read our stories.

Our group is Southern African of more or less the same generation so listening to one another's pieces, is specially interesting. There are seven of us altogether, 3 of whom have contributed to the CHOL 'Share Your Stories' project. The subjects are varied- following a delightful journey of Asia in the 70's, following a young movie producer's career which started off in a liberal bookshop in Johannesburg in the 1960's, to talking about the 1967 War in Israel and as far back as tracing Lithuanian roots while focussing on Yiddish as a mother tongue. And yes, plenty of stories about growing up in South Africa.

So, here's what I'd like to share with the CHOL group this time. Only relatively recently have I dug into a bit of our family history, the sad bits that were never talked about too much. I refer to the topic of mental illness as it presented itself in the community all those years back. I had known that my late father had an uncle Arthur and that he was sent to a mental hospital as they were called then. What I had not understood that for 14 years Arthur was hospitalised in the Fort Napier Mental Hospital in Pietermaritzburg where he died in 1941 in his early 40's... Imagine that in those days, the epilepsy he suffered from was an untreatable disease regarded as psychiatric. How sad is that?! I am about to venture on writing up Arthur's story, how I discovered what had happened to him and the sad reality in those days in South Africa when treatment was minimal, support hardly

present and the separation from family for literally years, quite common. I have a feeling there are many similar stories and experiences by members of CHOL.

In the meantime, just to say that your stories are always welcome. We shall be posting a few soon. Am sending the link to a story I recently found written by me when we on a Sabbatical in Rome in 2009! [https://www.chol.website/stories/My%20metal%20friends%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.chol.website/stories/My%20metal%20friends%20(2).pdf)

### Other bits of News:

- For those of you who have a Facebook Account, you are welcome to join the CHOL Facebook group, where you can see what is written and also post your own thoughts queries and pictures. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1161056445518485>
- Geraldine and I are working on the next series of zoom talks which we hope to announce soon. Watch this space!

Be well, everyone!

Feel free to write to us telling us what you're up to/suggesting ideas or forwarding your stories.

Best wishes,

Gail [gail@chol.website](mailto:gail@chol.website)

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### A word about me

I grew up in Cape Town, studied Medicine at UCT and then came on aliyah in 1976. After serving the community in Israel for decades in various capacities relating to my profession and on a voluntary basis, I recently retired. I still feel deeply attached to my roots. The formative years back then, growing up in apartheid South Africa, have been an immense influence in my life and the way I view things. I have been writing stories that are coloured by my South African background for as long as I can remember.

### An active story forum

We have established an active Share Your Stories forum, meeting regularly on Zoom, to listen to the stories, to chat about our writing and meet the writers. If you have already written or not yet taken the plunge, you are welcome to join our stories forum.

Read our 193 – and counting – stories here on the CHOL website [www.chol.website](http://www.chol.website) and click stories

### Contribute a story

I know from responses received that there are many of you who not only love expressing yourselves through writing but have been sharing your efforts with family and friends ever since you were old enough to type. If you have stories to contribute to these pages, please get in touch. Tell me where you are based. Include a little bit about yourself and the writing you do. We can discuss how you would like to be involved. When sending your stories, you are invited to include a short biography and background to the piece you are submitting. This could include the stage of your life in which it was written and the circumstances which stimulated you to write it. You are welcome to include a picture of yourself with the story.

I would really love to hear from you!

Gail Loon Lustig [gail@chol.website](mailto:gail@chol.website)

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**CHOL – Community History On-Line** is a forum set up in 2020, under the auspices of the Kaplan Centre at UCT and the South African Jewish Museum – bringing together all those working on / or interested in creating an online presence relating to the **History of Jewish Communities in Southern Africa**.

see [www.chol.website](http://www.chol.website) contact us at [info@chol.website](mailto:info@chol.website).

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Check out the CHOL website: [www.chol.website](http://www.chol.website) which now has on it:

- 58 [Communities](#)
- 65 [Memoirs](#)
- 193 original [Stories](#)
- 45 Videos of [Presentations](#)
- 24 [Newsletters](#)

Feel free to browse **resources** and **journal articles** as well as the above on the Site

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