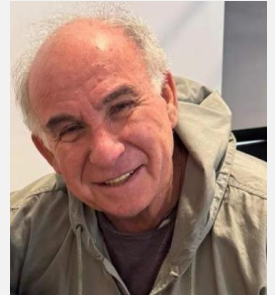


## A Tragic Romance and its Consequences by Eli Rabinowitz (Part 1)

All I ever have known is that: I am named after my great uncle Moshe;

Moshe died in a motor accident, six weeks before his planned wedding; the date of his death is unknown, but is sometime between the late 1920s and early 30s.

Then a photo given to me in 2011 changes everything!



I first become interested in genealogy in 1992 when a cousin jots down, on a piece of scrap paper, the seven names of my paternal ancestors. The result is the discovery of my connection to the Katzellenbogen rabbinic family tree through my great great grandmother, who appears in Neil Rosenstein's book, The Unbroken Chain.

My second boost comes in 2001 when a Hungarian politician makes contact via Saul Issroff in London, resulting in some unusual revelations on my maternal side, including two secular Muslim second cousins, who are actually halachically Jewish, living in Istanbul.

\*\*\*\*\*

In 1887 my zaida, Nachum Mendel, is born in Orla, a small village in NE Poland near Bialystok in the Grodno district. His original family name is Skarasjewski, but he changes it to Rabinowitz to escape being drafted into the Russian army. In the early 1900s my zaida leaves for Brest-Litovsk where he studies at the Brisk Yeshiva under Rav Chaim Soloveichik. Nachum Mendel then travels to Palestine, marries Chana Cheshe Miriam Herison in 1905 and migrates in 1911 to Volksrust, a "dorp" in Transvaal, South Africa. My dad, Zvi Hersh (Harry) is the first of his family to be born in South Africa in 1914. His two older brothers were born in Palestine. By 1919 the family has moved to Cape Town, where his two sisters Rachel and Sarah, are born, with Sarah, the youngest, in 1927. The family is joined by Nachum Mendel's younger brother, Moshe Zalman in 1921, and later by his sister, Chana.

On 8 November 2010, a Polish researcher, Wojciech Konończuk of Warsaw, makes contact after seeing my post on JewishGen's Family Finder. His family also comes from Orla, the same shtetl as my grandfather. Although not Jewish himself, Wojciech is writing a book on the Jews of Orla. There is no Yiskor book for Orla, so I volunteer to write and manage the Orla KehilaLink for JewishGen, the first of my 57! In May 2011 I visit Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary and Turkey, all for the first time.

On my way home to Australia, I visit my last surviving aunt, Sarah Stepansky, in Jerusalem. Sarah presents me with the following photo as a “reward” for my enthusiastic interest in our family history. I was the first of my family to make the journey back to Orla in over 90 years. The school photo contains the following information: Orla Folk School II in Yiddish on the front, and 1920 written on the back. My great uncle Moshe is identified by my aunt Sarah as the teacher in the bottom left of the photo.



Orla Folk School Class II in 1920 - Uncle Moshe is the teacher in the bottom left

I scan the photo on 7 June 2011 and email it to my family as well as Wojciech. On 25 July 2011, Wojciech emails me that he has received a photo from “Mary”, a researcher in London. Mary is researching the Lacki and Lichtzier families, also from Orla. She sends him the photo as it has Orla on a banner in the photo. Mary doesn’t know the names of the people in the photo but on seeing it, Wojciech immediately recognizes the teacher in the top left as the same person in the photo I had sent him in June, namely Moshe Rabinowitz.



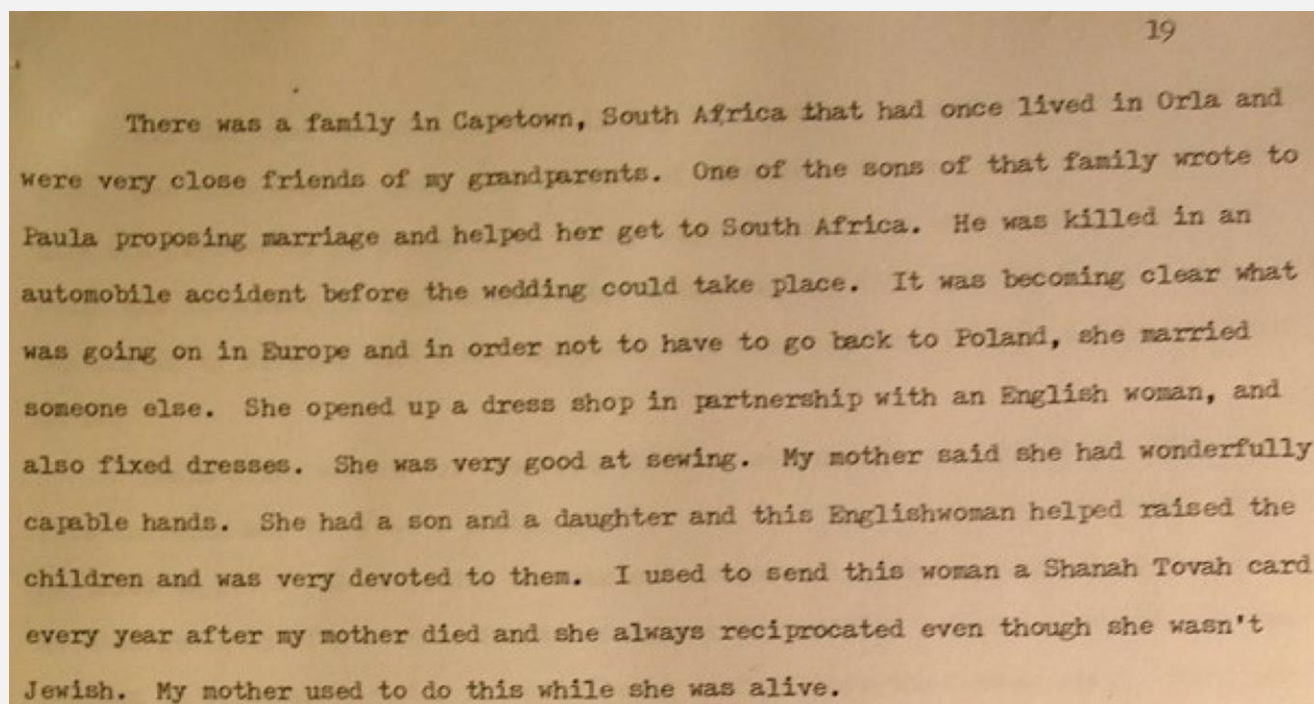
Orla Folk School Class in 1920 Uncle Moshe is in the top left.

The puzzle starts falling into place when Wojciech tells Mary that the man's name is Moshe Rabinowitz. She responds that a Moshe Rabinowitz from Orla was engaged in South Africa to Paula (Polly) Lichtzier from Orla, a member of the families she is researching. Mary adds that Moshe was killed in a motor accident six weeks before his planned wedding to Paula.

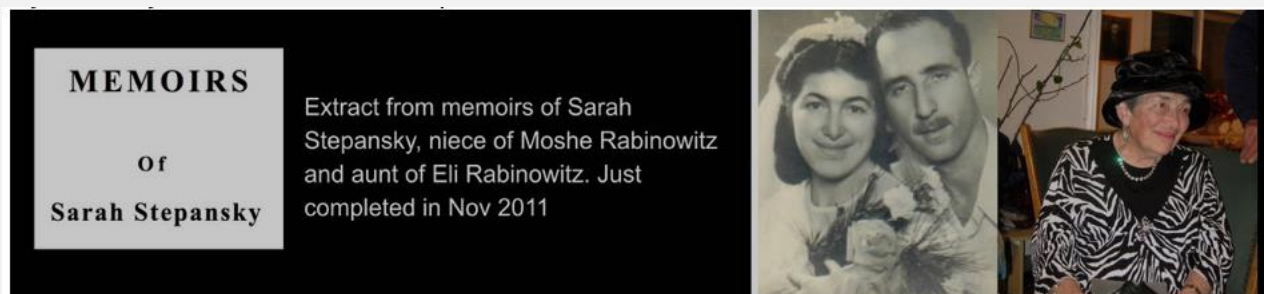
On making contact with Mary, she provides me with the name and address of Ray Hengy who lives in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. Ray is the daughter of Paula and Joe Pinn, the man whom Paula subsequently married, sometime after the tragedy. Ray also sends me a series of photos including several of Paula with her late fiancé's family. It is somewhat eerie receiving photos of my family from a stranger in Germany!

Ray provides me with more details of what she knows about Paula and Moshe. Apparently, her mother maintained a close relationship with Moshe's family in Cape Town after Moshe's tragic death.

Hungry for more details, I am able to access Paula's late cousin, Sylvia Kaspin's memoir.



By now, my aunt Sarah has also published her own memoir:



‘About a year after Avraham Yaakov left Orla to go to Israel, his son, Moshe, went to South Africa. He had already studied English by himself in Russia, so the language was not a problem for him. He studied bookkeeping at the University of Cape Town in three months and became an accountant and was also a teacher. He had been engaged to be married to Paula (Polly) Lichtzier, but tragically, six weeks prior to his marriage he was killed in an accident. I remained very close to his fiancée. When I was getting married, it was Polly who sewed my wedding gown, sight unseen, to a perfect fit, and sent it with my parents, who came from South Africa to the kibbutz for my wedding’.

In May 2012, I meet Ray and her husband Heinrich in Warsaw, and together with Wojciech and my wife Jill, we travel to Treblinka, Orla and Bialystok. Ray shows me something she is wearing. It is the





Ray and I at the entrance of Orla, eastern Poland, the town the two families came from

engagement ring that Moshe had given to her mother. Ray wears it on special occasions. The ring was treasured by her mother throughout her life as the physical memory of Moshe.

In May 2013 I visit Ray and Heinrich in Freiburg. We search for more photos of Moshe and Paula and we find a framed photo of them on the wall.

However, I am still missing dates and details of the tragic circumstances of Moshe's death.

I ask two of my cousins whether they have any further information. They give me one clue: they remember that their dad, my uncle Isaac, recited the mourner's kaddish for his uncle Moshe each year, on the second last day of Pesach.

I check the website of the Cape Town Jewish Cemeteries Maintenance Board for any deaths or burials in Cape Town with the name Moshe Rabinowitz or similar. I find one Morris Rabinowitz, but for some strange reason, the date is shown as "-0001". The information I was hoping for, was missing.

CAPE TOWN  
JEWISH CEMETERIES  
MAINTENANCE BOARD

HOME • ABOUT • FIND A DECEASED • DONATE • CONTACT US Login / Register

SEARCH FOR A DECEASED RELATIVE/FRIEND

First Name :

Last Name :

SEARCH RESULTS

Full Name	Hebrew Name	Year of Death
<a href="#">Moshe Rabinowitz</a>	HaRav Moshe Ya'acov ben Binyamin	1977
<a href="#">Misha Rabinowitz</a>	Michael ben Pinchas HaLevi	1951
<a href="#">Miriam Rabinowitz</a>		1994
<a href="#">Minnie Rabinowitz</a>	Mina Rivkah bat Mordecai HaKohain	1963
<a href="#">Minnie Rabinowitz</a>	Mina bat Aharon	1957
<a href="#">Maurice Rabinowitz</a>	Moshe ben Michael HaLevi	1993
<a href="#">Maria Rabinowitz</a>	Miryam bat Baruch	1995
<a href="#">Morris Rabinowitz</a>		-0001

I call the Chevra Kadisha in Cape Town and am given the date of 4/9/31, (4 September 1931), which is nowhere near Pesach in the Hebrew calendar. I check my iPhone's Pocket Luach, transpose the date to 9/4/31 and voila! It is the 2<sup>nd</sup> last day of Pesach 1931!

I get back to the Chevra. They find their error, update their database and give me the correct details and the location of the *matseva*: Woltemade / Maitland Cemetery (Gate 8). Those who know Cape Town will tell you that it is not safe to visit this cemetery alone. The Chevra assigns a security guard, affectionately called Dovid Ben Yok, to accompany me. I take photos and have the inscription interpreted by my cousin, Hadara Boczko, daughter of Sarah.



Now armed with a date, I ask Jocelyn and Tammy at the Gitlin Library in Cape Town to be on the lookout for any articles around this date. This library has an excellent collection of old Jewish newspapers bound in folders. Jocelyn finds a report in the SA Jewish Chronicle from April 1931. Jocelyn and Tammy suggest I visit the National Library to check the microfilms of the two local newspapers, The Argus and The Cape Times. I find the accident reports. I also locate the Death Notice and other legal documents at the Western Cape Archives in Roeland Street.

### Condolences.

We regret to announce the death, as a result of a motor accident early on Wednesday morning, of Mr. M. Rabinowitz, of Wynberg. He was a brother of Rev. Rabinowitz, of Cape Town, and of Miss Rabinowitz, teacher at the New Kindergarten just opened at the Zionist Hall.

Mr. Rabinowitz was a member of the teaching staff of the Wynberg Hebrew School and was highly respected by all who knew him. He will be sadly missed and we cannot all but regret the untimely end to a promising career.

The funeral took place on Thursday afternoon from the Wynberg Synagogue and was attended by a representative gathering of friends and colleagues.

Our deepest sympathies are extended to his family, as well as to his fiancé.



# FATAL CAR CRASH AT SALT RIVER

## YOUNG TEACHER KILLED

A young Jewish teacher of Hebrew named Rabinowitz, living at Coghill's Hotel, Wynberg, was fatally injured in a collision between a motor-car and a bus at Salt River at 12.40 a.m. to-day.

He was a passenger in a motor-car driven by Mr. Katz, manager of the Mowbray Hotel, Mowbray. The collision took place at the corner of Durham-avenue and the Main-road, Salt River. The motor-car struck the rear end of the bus, which had turned down Durham-avenue on the way to a garage.

The car swerved across the road and mounted the pavement on the sea side of the road. The car was badly smashed. When Rabinowitz was extricated he was taken to the Woodstock Hospital, where he died a few minutes after admission.

The dead man was a brother of the Rev. Mr. Rabinowitz, a Jewish minister of Constitution-street. He was engaged to be married to a young woman who recently arrived from Palestine.

7214-17/8/27-20,000 S.

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.

### DEATH NOTICE.

Pursuant to the Provisions contained in "The Administration of Estates Act, 1913."

U.D.J. 294.  
Case No. 1.  
No. 25837  
21 APR 1931  
MASTER'S OFFICE

1. Name of deceased..... Morris Rabinowitz

2. Birthplace and Nationality of the deceased..... Orla, British Isles

3. Names and Addresses of the Parents of the deceased.....  
 Father..... Abraham Jacob Rabinowitz  
 Mother..... Margherita Jerusalem Palestine

4. Age of the deceased..... 34 years..... 2 months.

5. Occupation in life of the deceased, or, if a woman, of her husband..... Hebrew Teacher

6. Ordinary place of residence of the deceased, or, if a woman, of her husband..... Coghill's Wynberg

7. Married or unmarried, widower or widow..... Unmarried

(a) Name of surviving spouse (if any) and whether married in community of property or not.....

(b) Name or names and approximate date of death of predeceased spouse or spouses.....

(c) Place of last marriage.....

8. The day of the decease: on..... 21st April 1931..... 192.....

9. Where the person died.....  
 House..... Woodstock Hospital  
 Town or Place..... Woodstock  
 District.....

10. Names of children of the deceased, and whether majors or minors.....  
 Only Father of deceased.....  
 1. Mahmud Mendel Rabinowitz..... 6 Bedford St. Eton  
 2. Heine Rabinowitz..... 63 Upper Hill St. Eton  
 3. Sarah Bronshteyn..... Zichron Tsviya Palestine  
 4. Raisel Tzora..... Deceased no children  
 5. Ada Tzora Rabinowitz..... Deceased

11. Has the deceased left any movable property?..... Yes

12. Has the deceased left any immovable property?..... No

13. Is it estimated that the estate exceeds £300 in value?..... Yes

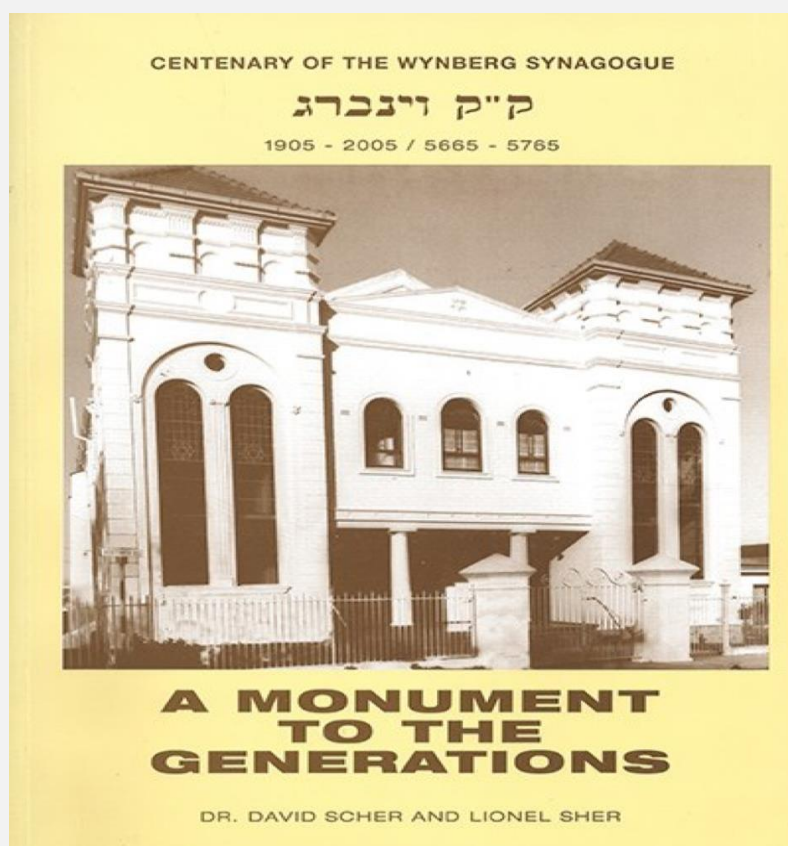
14. Has the deceased left a will?..... No Will

Dated at..... Wynberg.....  
 the..... 15th day of..... April..... 1931.....

(Signature)..... M. Rabinowitz  
Deceased  
 (State in what capacity and whether at the time at or near the place of death.)..... Magistrate

This notice must be filled up and signed by the nearest relative or connexion of the deceased who shall at the time be at or near the place of death, or, in the absence of such near relative or connexion, by the person who at or immediately after the death shall have the chief charge of the house in, or the place on, which the death occurred, and must be sent either to the Master, or, if the death occurred in a district wherein a seat of provincial government is not situated, the magistrate of the district, in duplicate, within fourteen days of the death.

I am now in possession of other vital details that allow me to follow up. I visit the scene of the accident, 82 years after it happened!



Knowing that Moshe was a teacher at the Wynberg Talmud Torah at the Wynberg Synagogue, I find out that Moshe was also the secretary at the shul. An excellent source is this book written by historian Dr David Scher and Lionel Sher, a copy which can be found in the library at the Kaplan Centre, UCT.



'Just how dependent the congregation was on its personnel, could be seen in the passing of Mr M Rabinowitz, who was killed in an accident in early 1931. Mr Rabinowitz had acted as Secretary to the Congregation and teacher at the Wynberg Talmud Torah for some 9 years. Without him the seating arrangements for that year, were chaotic. As the minutes of 9 August, 1931 relate, 'nothing (concerning seats ) was left on record since the late Secretary used to remember all by heart'! It took 5 successive weeks of advertising in the Cape Argus to sort out the problem of vacant and filled seats more-or-less'.



*Hewbrew school and kindergarten picnic at Youngsfield Forest 1922,  
with pupils, parents and committee members.*

Wanting to research further and keen to connect with descendants who may have more to contribute, I meet Paula's extended family in New York, Toronto and Israel: Robby Gordon, Glenna Gordon, Rose Kamnitzer and Michal Itzhaki.

Rose Kamnitzer in Toronto has a collection of family photos from her parents Berl Liadsky and Bella Lichtzier, Paula's sister. Berl was also Moshe's good friend. They corresponded by postcard after Moshe arrived in South Africa in 1920 until Berl arrived in 1929. These photos in Rose's collection were taken in Poland and South Africa and are special in many respects.



New York with Glenna and Dad, Robby Gordon



Israel with Michal Itzhaki



Toronto with Rose Kamntizer





These are the only photos of **Moshe and Paula** taken together, in Cape Town.





**Left to right:** Moshe with his nephew Isaac, with niece Sarah, Paula, an unknown man and Moshe's friend, Berl Liadsky

My journey of discovery, starting with a photo given to me in Israel, has taken me to Germany, South Africa, Poland, the USA, the UK, Canada and back to Israel, with updates to my research findings in each destination!

It has been the subject of my lecture at the IAJGS35 conference in Jerusalem in July 2015, and at subsequent venues and presentations in South Africa and Australia.

But my search isn't complete.

The details of the driver of the vehicle in the fatal accident are still of interest. The newspaper cutting tells us that Mr M Katz was the manager of the Mowbray Hotel. I've tried accessing the archives of the company that once owned the hotel, the bus company most likely involved in the accident and consulted various Cape Town historians. So far, I have struck out on these.

I am still hopeful that more leads will come my way! And so...to be continued.....

Additional slides relating to my story can be viewed on my website at:

[http://elirab.com/Moshe\\_%26\\_Paula\\_Online.html#5](http://elirab.com/Moshe_%26_Paula_Online.html#5)

on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/mosheandpaula/>

and via my Litvak Portal: <http://elirab.me/litvak-portal/moshe-paula/>

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## **A Tragic Romance and its Consequences by Eli Rabinowitz**

**Written in November, 2015**

### **A Word about me:**

Eli Rabinowitz was born in Cape Town and has lived in Perth Australia since 1986. Eli has researched his family's and Jewish cultural history for over 30 years. He has travelled extensively, and writes about Jewish life and travel on his website: <https://elirab.me>

Eli is one of the founders of CHOL

The Partisans' Song Project <https://elirab.me/znk>

The WE ARE HERE! Foundation <https://wah.foundation>

IN MY POCKET Project <https://elirab.au>

More details: <https://about.me/elirab>

**Posted on the 'Share Your Stories' CHOL site in July 2025**