

## A Tale of Two Shuls by Ivor Kosowitz

There were two neighbourhood shuls where we lived; the Vredehoek and Schoonder Street Shuls. As we were members of the latter, my recollections relate mostly to that, although I am sure that it applied to the former as well.

At Pesach time, many of us kids went to shul, mainly because our parents said we had to. Once there, I doubt that many of us actually went inside. So, the big event, outside of course, was to play “marbles” with hazel and walnuts. Who said we were supposed to eat them? The walnuts were the “goonies” and the hazel nuts were the “marbles”. I recall that this was really big at the Vredehoek Shul as it had an enclosed courtyard at the front.

Succot was another special *chag*. A large curved *succah* was built at the back of the “Round” Shul. After every service, large trays of delicious sponge cake were brought out. You could have wine and salty herring in addition to the cake. Some of us kids thought the cake was great, so we stuffed our *tallis* bags full of the stuff, to take home!

As we became barmitzvah, we were invited to attend *gemorah* classes after service on Shabbat mornings. The teacher was a Mr. Kooperman. As he mainly spoke Yiddish, and as the *gemorah* is mainly in Aramaic and Hebrew, we kids never actually learned much. However, we were introduced to “Bob”. No not a person, but a Jewish dish made from broad beans.

Other mainly delicious foods which we grew up with were *taigelach*, *imberlach*, *pretzelach*, *petcha* (made from calf’s hooves), *perogen*, *kreplach*, *henzel*, herring and chopped herring, chopped liver, gefilte fish, *kneidelach* – boiled and baked, bagels, *babkes*, *bulkas*, *hammantashen* and *kichel*. Some of these we still enjoy today. Only in South Africa, challah is called *kitke*. No one seems to know the origin and why this unique to SA.

Many maid servants became kosher cooking experts, and this was very desirable if they wanted to work in a Jewish home.

The Saturday night 'Slichot Service' was the highlight of the year especially if you were in the choir. We arrived at about 8pm. A 16mm black and white movie was shown, usually a B-rate western “flick”. We had to hire a projector in those days, and the movie was on large reels of celluloid. After that, a large spread was put on for us by the Ladies Guild.

As *slichot* is at midnight it was an effort to keep the sopranos (boys under 12) awake, and in any event they were tanked up with sugar so it was extremely difficult for the choir master, Jeff Koussevitsky, to keep them under control.

One *slichot* service, my friend and I smuggled a cassette tape recorder into shul and put it under the bimah. This way we recorded the service which was full of amazing choral

pieces. My friend, in Sydney, and I still have this recording today, about 43 years later. So, the only two copies in existence, are in Australia!

When Rosh Hashana came around, the shuls were full to overflowing with standing room only. I remember that every year, the *shamash*, Mr Rivkin, blew the *shofar*. Except for once, when our Rabbi decided to try. Well, he should have thought otherwise. He could not get one note out properly. We, in the choir loft, above him could not contain ourselves, and just cracked up laughing, actually rolling on the floor! What an embarrassment.

The choir was great, not the best, though. The best choir was at the Gardens Shul. We had the best *chazzan*, Cantor Simcha Koussevitzky. Anyway, we used to get paid for rehearsals and services. Two long serving tenors were Jackie Schwartz and Les Wexler. Mr. Herrison sang bass.

One person I almost forgot to mention, was Cantor Immerman also known as the “Blind Chazan”. He held the position of *Chazan Sheini*. Sadly, he was blind from a very early age but had an incredible gift. He was able to retain the whole *torah* and *siddur* in his memory. He also taught many their barmitzvah portions, and could tell your name just by listening to your voice. He truly had a long life having lived to the age of about 95.

It was interesting that in the 50’s, the “Gabbis” all wore top hats. This was a “hangover” from the English roots of Cape Town Jewry. Apparently, such hats are still worn in some of London’s oldest shuls, even today.

Those were the wonderful days that we were privileged to have experienced.

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