

## **Henny And Julius - A Love Story by Beulah Gross**

Henny Eliasov and Julius Ausbruch were my maternal grandparents and the story below is what she told me, her oldest grandchild.

The family lived in Libau (now Liepaja) in Lithuania. Mariana Mau, Henny's mother, was engaged to Kasreel Baetz when she met Avrom Eliasov at a friend's house. As soon as Avrom saw Mariana, he told himself that this was the girl he was going to marry, but didn't say anything to her. He seems to have just bided his time.

Soon after this meeting, Mariana broke off her engagement to Kasreel because of a silly argument about gloves Kasreel had given her as a present. When they next went out, he asked her why she wasn't wearing them. She replied that they were so nice she was saving them for a special occasion. At this he lost his temper and told her that whenever she was with him, was a special occasion.

Kasreel's angry reaction to her innocent reply, made Mariana think more seriously about marrying him and she broke off the engagement. She returned the gloves, but kept the ring.

When my mother was a child, she found a gold hooped ring that closed in two clasped hands in a small wooden Beecham's Pills box hidden in a large trunk in Mariana's bedroom. Mariana grabbed it away saying that it was none of her business. Many years later Mariana gave it to her saying that it was her engagement ring from Kasreel. I inherited the ring, but it was stolen during a burglary.

Kasreel went to Finland where he worked as a capmaker. He married Boona, his employer's sixteen-year-old daughter. They were my paternal great-grandparents. After some years, Kasreel and Boona went to South Africa and settled in Oudtshoorn in the Cape Colony. They had no children for 16 years and then had seven in fairly quick succession.

Mariana married Avrom in Libau in about 1880. Henny was born on 12 August 1883, the eldest of five children and the only girl. Avrom emigrated alone to South Africa in about 1894 finally settling in Port Elizabeth in the Cape Colony. He became a bootmaker specialising in corrective footwear and regularly sent money to Mariana for the family's upkeep and their eventual passage to South Africa. They joined him in 1902, eight years later.

No one knows how or when Henny and Julius met, but it was probably at one of the many Jewish functions and parties in the early 1900s in Port Elizabeth. Julius was born in Berlin on 28 August 1884; nothing is known about his family, why he was in South Africa or how he got there.

Henny told me that they fell in love very quickly, but had to keep it secret because Julius was poor and had no prospects. Seeking to change his fortunes he went to Germiston near Johannesburg in the Transvaal (1083 km northeast of Port Elizabeth). He and Henny corresponded secretly through Post-Restante and I have several letters and some poems of theirs translated from German.

Henny was very attractive and had many suitors. She was engaged several times, but always changed her mind and broke off the engagements. This upset her father who told her she was too choosy. Finally, Avrom told Henny that he'd arranged for her to marry her cousin, Harry Katz, who lived in Prieska, a small town in

the Northern Cape. Harry was involved with racehorses and had several other business interests, so was quite wealthy.

Henny was not keen on this enforced engagement not only because she was already committed to Julius, but also because Harry was illiterate. All her life, Henny revered education and never stopped learning, something she and her mother had in common.

Knowing that her father was adamant about this engagement, Henny agreed, on condition that she first be allowed to go on holiday to friends in Johannesburg. She told no one that she wanted to be near Julius and had no intention of returning to Port Elizabeth.

Avrom was not happy about this, but Henny was very strong-willed and eventually he reluctantly allowed her to go; somehow, she even persuaded him to pay the fare.

Julius met her at Johannesburg station and when he saw her engagement ring, he pocketed the 'bauble' as he called it. There is no record of what happened to this ring but it is assumed she returned it to Harry Katz.

Julius gave Henny his own engagement ring, a hoop of five yellow river diamonds. He also gave her a pair of diamond earrings. These are now with family in Israel.

Henny extended her stay in Johannesburg several times until her father lost patience with her for delaying the arranged marriage. He was so angry that he sent Mariana to Johannesburg to fetch her, but Mariana was forced to return to Port Elizabeth alone.

Soon after this, on 20 December 1910, Henny and Julius were secretly married in a civil ceremony in Johannesburg. They chose not to live together as they were committed to Judaism and family and wanted a proper religious wedding in a synagogue.

They bought a second-hand clothing shop with their savings and she then returned to Port Elizabeth to inform her parents of her marriage. Avrom had no option but to accept the match and arranged for a wedding in synagogue as soon as Julius returned to Port Elizabeth.

Julius tried to build up his new business, but didn't have his heart in it because he was so lonely without Henny. Within a few months he sold up and returned to Port Elizabeth. He arrived with a pair of opera glasses for Henny and very little else. They were married in synagogue in Port Elizabeth on 16 May 1911. My brother has the opera glasses.

Henny and Julius could not afford a taxi to take them to their new home in Castle Street after the reception, so they slipped out through the back door and walked there in their wedding outfits.

Despite the fact that she had jilted him, Harry remained good friends with Henny and Julius and often visited their home. Often Henny made him write to his mother in Sweden, probably writing the letters for him as she was insistent that family should always remain in contact.

Henny and Julius had four children: Ida (my mother), Isabel Johanna, Ghita Naomi and Solly.

They moved house many times because their fortunes in business were mostly difficult, but always remained in the Port Elizabeth area to be near family especially Mariana and Avrom. Despite this, all their children reported that their parents were loving and that their home life was always full of joy.

Julius, who was a talented musician, led musical evenings at home playing his violin or the piano. Gypsy music was a great favourite. He and Henny also played cards with the children as well as enjoying card evenings with friends. As a result, all their children played cards most of their lives. Henny taught me to play Patience and Rummy and to this day I play cards avidly.

Julius died very suddenly on 6 January 1938, just 48 years old, from either tuberculosis or lung cancer as he was a chain smoker.

For the rest of her life, Henny spoke of Julius as if he had just gone away for a trip. She was convinced that they would be reunited one day to continue their life, sharing their deep love for each other. She hardly ever revealed how deeply she missed him and how lonely she was without him, but those closest to her know that she talked to him every night before saying her prayers and going to sleep.

Instead of wallowing in self-pity, Henny faced up to life, supporting and raising her family with the same indomitable strength of will and purpose that had made her defy her father when she decided to marry Julius. She moved her family into an apartment in Port Elizabeth and began a new career as a dressmaker, but it was difficult making ends meet. One night she dreamed of Julius with a suitcase and when she asked where he was going, he replied 'Johannesburg'. Henny took this dream as a sign that she should go to Johannesburg but first she farmed the children out to various relatives and went to Bloemfontein, Orange Free State, to stay with a cousin and set up a business.

Ida, Henny's oldest child and my mother, told me that Henny was unhappy about not going to Johannesburg as Julius had indicated in her dream and eventually did make the move. She also ensured that her children joined her so they were a family again.

It was a measure of Henny's loving care and friendly personality that she always kept open house wherever she lived, often despite straitened circumstances. Her children's friends were always welcome in her house for meals and often stayed overnight. This way, Henny maintained, she always knew where her children were and who their friends were. All the young people who visited were fond of Henny and used to call her 'Ma'.

Henny worked hard to support her young family and was often hard put to make ends meet. Nevertheless, she helped all her children financially from time to time even if she went without something herself. She was an excellent provider and no one ever went hungry or without good clothes, especially the girls because Henny was a superb seamstress.

After all her children were married, Henny was a constant and welcome visitor in their homes and was dearly loved by her grandchildren. She ensured they knew all about Julius and he became, certainly for me, a living, loving friend.

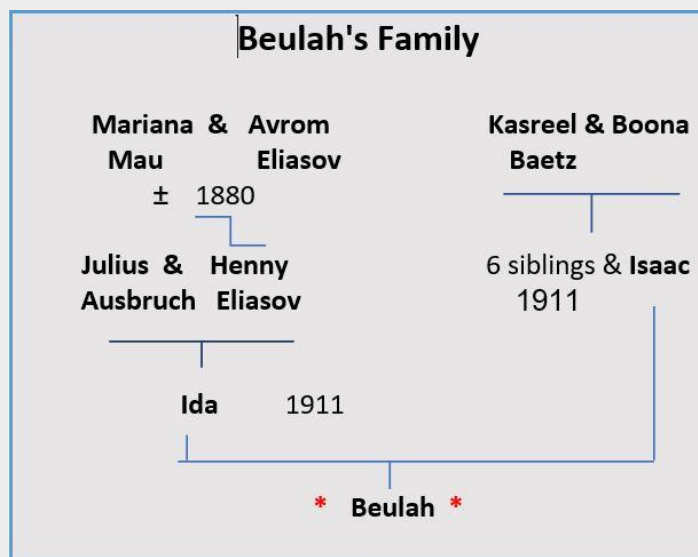
Eventually Henny moved in with us and opened a shop selling second-hand furniture, books, bric-a-brac etc around the corner from the house. She kept this for about five years but eventually sold it and moved back into the city. She rented a small flat from which she did dressmaking, calling herself, 'Madame Henny'. She did very well as she was a superb dressmaker, but eventually this became too tiring and time-consuming.

Just before her 82nd birthday, Henny visited a friend in the Jewish Old Aged Home in Sandringham. She decided immediately that she wanted to live there. Despite everyone's objections, Henny was adamant and as usual got her own way. Everyone visited her often and she was happy there. In her 85th year, Henny fell and broke her hip. She became disoriented and was clearly failing.

Henny died on 6 August, just six days before her 86th birthday with her beloved Julius's name on her lips. She has left behind a rich heritage of strength and caring, a strong belief in Judaism and knowledge of the power of love. She remains in our memory forever.

Keeping in mind the time differences between producing offspring, it seems that fate had a hand in joining Mariana and Kasreel's families.

Kasreel and Boona's sixth child and oldest son, Isaac, born December 1911 and Mariana's grand-daughter, Henny and Julius's oldest child, Ida, born February 1912, were married in Johannesburg in October 1936. They were my parents.



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**Mariana and Avrom**



**Julius and Henny**



**Kasreel and Boona**



**Isaac and Ida**



**Beulah Gross**