

# The Lee Family

## Harold and Tilly and children Alan, Mervyn (Ginger) Raynor and Malcolm

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Harold Lee settled in Beaufort West in 1926 as a newly qualified medical practitioner.



He was born in Cape Town, educated at the South African College School (SACS) where he matriculated in 1918, two years in advance of his peers. He wanted to study Medicine. In those years the University of Cape Town could only offer Medicine up to year three and then there was an option of completing their studies, another 2.5 years, either at Dresden University, Germany or St Bartholomew's in London. He opted for London.

The original family name was Levy under which he studied and qualified. But in order to advance his postgraduate studies, in the UK in 1922, changing his surname to Lee, at Somerset house in London for the princely sum of £1, proved a great help.

After returning from the UK in about 1923 with his MBChB from UCT and LRCP Lond and MRCS Eng qualifications, he first practised in Keimoes, near Upington, before moving to the Karoo town of Beaufort West as the Railway Medical Officer (RMO).

In 1929 he married Tillie Dembovsky and brought his new bride to Beaufort West. He continued to practise as the RMO in Beaufort until 1940, after which he volunteered for military service in the Union Defence Force.

While living in Beaufort West, for 11 years, the couple were very involved in the Jewish community of the town, and he soon became the revered doctor to the general community.

He was not only the RMO but also had a private practice. He was such a dedicated doctor that in the middle of the Karoo winter nights, he would motor to a remote farm to assist a person in distress. As part of his RMO duties, he would travel weekly by train to Hutchinson on the main rail line to attend to patients there.

While in Beaufort West, they had 5 children, two of which sadly were stillborn and are interred in the Jewish cemetery there. Alas, the graves are unmarked and even the local municipal office was unable to produce a layout plan or identify those persons buried in the unmarked graves. The other children were Alan, Mervyn (Ginger) and Raynor.

While Harold was on active military service in Kenya, Tilly moved back to Cape Town to get better education for her children. The boys were enrolled at Sea Point Boys' High School where they both matriculated.

Harold contracted rheumatic fever while on active service, was returned to the Union of South Africa in 1942 and discharged as unfit for duty. This left him with a severely compromised heart.

At the insistence of the Union Government, which was then very involved in the war effort, he was made the RMO of the Salt River Railway Works. He purchased a house in Milner Road, Woodstock, and set up his consulting rooms adjacent to the house. Despite his poor health, he built up a large private medical practice, served the railway working force at Salt River Works and the residents of Woodstock. Because of the proximity to the Salt River Railway Works, many of the workers resided in the Woodstock area. Again, he became the extremely revered medical practitioner. His MRCS qualification stood him in good stead as he did sterling work at the Woodstock Cottage Hospital. His exceptional ardour and dedication resulted in him becoming the Honorary Superintendent of that hospital. In 1944 Malcolm, the 'laatlammetjie', was born, the youngest and last child of the couple



Until 1948 both Harold and Tilly were very involved in the Jewish communal life in Woodstock. Although there were five Jewish doctors practising in the area, he was the doctor of choice in the community.

In April 1948, Raynor, the only daughter, unfortunately contracted polio and passed away at the age of 11 years. The shock of that loss resulted in Tilly being in a perpetual state of mourning which persisted until she passed away on Rosh Hashana 1986. After Raynor's demise, Harold immersed himself totally in his work, including succumbing to some social excesses, which probably led to his premature death in June 1955 at the relatively young age of 54 years.

### **The Lee children – Siblings: Alan, Mervyn (Ginger) Raynor and Malcolm**

**The oldest son, Alan**, matriculated at the Sea Point Boys' High School (SPBH) and then studied medicine at UCT. Whilst probably not the most brilliant of students, he was fortunate to have an exemplary tutor in his able father. Malcolm clearly recalls the two of them having in depth, involved discussions about Alan's UCT studies and Harold providing expert guidance. These discussions often went on into the early hours. Alan accompanied his father on house calls and went with him to the hospital, and often assisted him in the operating theatre. After Alan qualified and completed his residency, Harold's health declined rapidly. Alan was immediately taken into the practice to assist as a partner.

After Harold's death, Alan took over his late father's medical practice and became the RMO of Woodstock. Unfortunately, unknown pressures resulted in his dependence on prescription medicines. Inevitably and sadly, he lost the battle to rehabilitate and was forced to terminate his professional life prematurely. After institutionalisation as an in-patient, he developed a pulmonary embolism and passed away in 1990.

**Mervyn (Ginger)** also matriculated at SPBH and was sent to Wits University to study dentistry. At Wits, he did not apply himself to his studies, but indulged in a one-year social whirl which resulted in the Dean of the Faculty requesting his father to remove him from the course. When Mervyn returned to Cape Town, his father mapped out a 5-year commercial, hands-on training programme. Initially, he became a commercial representative but ended up in the same Karoo town where his father had practised as a medical practitioner. As part of the 5-year course, he worked in the general dealer's business of Charley Dubowitz in New Street, **Beaufort West**. While in the town, Mervyn joined the local baseball club where he gained a reputation of being a most formidable pitcher and player of note.

In 1957 Mervyn went to live in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, where he was the representative for BATA Shoes for Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now Zimbabwe and Malawi). As a result of Alan's dilemma, Mervyn was persuaded in 1963 by his mother to return to Cape Town. Fortuitously, the BATA company needed a representative for the Cape area, and he was duly appointed. He met and married Mavis Lazarus shortly after his return in December 1963. They initially lived in Sea Point and subsequently in Rondebosch. They had three children, one of whom was stillborn. He worked in the shoe fashion industry until he retired in 2001 after which they moved to a retirement village in Milnerton. He passed away in September 2007 and Mavis lives at Highlands House, the Jewish Home for the Aged in Cape Town.

Mervyn and Mavis had two sons. The elder, Howard, had an unfortunate start to life but was saved. He matriculated at Westerford High School and subsequently became a cost accountant. Unfortunately, he developed a brain tumour and passed away at an early age. Jonathan, who is now in his late 50's, also matriculated at Westerford, and studied to become an attorney. He found it very difficult to get his LLB, as he seemed unable to get accepted to do his articles. He eventually joined the SANDF legal section, where, with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, he still works today. He is divorced, with no children.



**Malcolm the *laatlammetjie*** (affectionately known as Mack, Mac or Maccie from childhood) remained in the Woodstock home until 1963 at which time Ginger, who had returned from Rhodesia, insisted that his mother sell the house. Malcolm and Tilly subsequently moved to an apartment off Regent Road in Sea Point. Maccie met Avril Blitz in 1963, and they married in June 1969.

Avril Blitz

Maccie had matriculated in 1961 from the Observatory Boy's High School and served an apprenticeship as an electrician at the 'old' Escom. He also attended lectures weekly at the Cape Technical College in Longmarket Street, Cape



Town. In 1964 he did the compulsory nine months of military training. He passed the Trade Test early in 1965, attained the Electrical Wireman's Certification and embarked on a varied career in various branches of the trade.

Malcolm joined the Trust Bank Engineering Department and was transferred first to Port Elizabeth and then to Kempton Park (a town on the East Rand near Johannesburg where the international airport is located – once called Jan Smuts Airport now OR Tambo Airport). He became the resident building engineer in the bank's high-rise buildings. With the financial demise of Trust Bank, he was retrenched and then opened his own electrical contractor business in the town with the admirable assistance of the local Jewish community. After living there for 12 years, the yearning for Cape Town became too strong, and the family returned to the Cape to live in Claremont.

Since their return to the Cape, Maccie had a varied career culminating as a tourist guide for 13 years. COVID-19 followed by ill health terminated that career. Avril became the PA to a company which markets Mining Test Equipment and has remained there until her retirement after 28 years. Currently the couple live in a retirement village in Panorama, near Parow.



**Maccie and Avril** have two children. **Son, Colin**, born in 1971, matriculated from the Rhodes High School. He then voluntarily joined the SANDF Airforce where he qualified as a helicopter technician. He saw no future there and branched out in his field. He is currently working in Haifa (Israel) with a private helicopter charter operator, servicing the gas-rigs offshore in the Mediterranean. He is married out of the faith, has three daughters, who live in Cape Town with their mother. **Daughter, Adele**, born in 1974, matriculated from Sans Souci Girls' High School and then studied at CPUT to become a renal technician. She made Aliyah in 1996 and has two sons. She is divorced, living in Manchester UK, and working at King David School as an administrative secretary.

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The Lee family story compiled by Natie Finkelstein from information and pictures from Malcolm Lee, Cape Town, August 2024

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