

Roodepoort Clive Buchler, An Editor, Remembers

My Jewish friends of Roodepoort

Cliff Buchler, a resident of Roodepoort for many years, was apprenticed as a printer in the late 50s and worked at the Model Printing Co in Burger Street, Roodepoort. Burger Street formed part of the central business district and hosted many Jewish owned shops and offices. Together with Van Wyk Street, this was the hub of West Rand shopping. Businesses included Electric House and Simon Timber – two major suppliers of electric products and appliances and timber and hardware respectively. The era of large shopping centres had not yet dawned.

Selfishly perhaps, Buchler who was not Jewish himself, had two favourite shops, **Greenberg's and Morrie's Outfitters** – both in Burger Street. The two owners had their stationery done at Model Printing, and through this connection, Buchler became intimate friends with them. He recalls buying his first suit from Greenberg's at the pricey sum of six pounds sterling. With his meagre earning as an apprenticeship, he couldn't afford to pay cash for the suit.

'Not to worry,' said Barney Greenberg. 'You can pay it off at two and six a week'. Further sales of shirts, suits, shoes and ties took place over a four-year period – on the same terms. Similar conditions applied at 'Morrie's'.

Years later, Buchler became the editor of the Roodepoort Record, and the friendship with these 'mensches' remained until their passing. Meanwhile he forged friendships with other Jewish business people like **Mark Herson**, the only pharmacist in the CBD at the time, Dave Myerson of Station Garage, **Barry Geffen**, optometrist, and **Eunice 'Ma' Kab**, for bicycles and parts, vehicle spares for any known and unknown models

Then there was **Rubenstein's** Jewellers of Goldman Street in what was then the Florida CBD. Before Roodepoort was given city status, the municipality consisted of three main suburbs: Florida, Maraisburg and Roodepoort. Florida was then considered the upmarket 'village' – an appropriate place for a jeweller. Here again, owner Leon was never hesitant offering rings and things on account. The Buchlers still today have pieces purchased from Rubenstein's.

As a member of the local Rotary Club, Buchler made the acquaintance of attorneys **Richard Steyn** and **Ronnie Sack**. It was an open secret that these two made generous donations to the underprivileged communities under the auspices of the service club. They also offered pro bono or discounted services to clients who could ill-afford attorneys' fees.

What made these folk special, in Buchler's eyes, was they accepted him in their circle, despite his Gentile status. Never a word of criticism passed their lips. He was even invited to sup with them on special occasions and learnt to eat and enjoy pukka kosher dishes.

On one occasion he dared write jocularly in his weekly column about the orthodox menu provided by the Hersons. The hosts took it in good spirit – but Mark hinted that the Rabbi wasn't 'too happy about it'. Buchler's wife insisted he apologise in the next column – which he duly did. Soon after publication of the apology Buchler had his eyes tested by Barry Geffen. He teased Buchler for being 'chicken and henpecked' – but not a word of censure. Buchler took that as meaning all was forgiven for what could have been considered a sensitive issue among the Jewish community.

It was a sad day for Buchler when the synagogue in Roodepoort was deconsecrated – and his very special friends moved too far away for him to stay in touch.

It soon became evident with this exodus of what was before a vibrant and active society, coupled with the mushrooming of large malls, the shopping scene underwent a disastrous metamorphosis.

But what has remained are good memories of a magic era that will linger forever.

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Story sent by Clive Buchler to Brian Josselowitz 2018

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