

## Roodepoort: Hammerschlag Family: Bert and Clara

(Lived in Florida)

Story sent by their daughter Barbara Potter

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I was born in 1945 and according to my DNA, an Ashkenazi Jew. I lived at 3 Shamrock Street, Florida with my parents Bert and Clara Hammerschlag as well as my grandfather Isadore and my brother Selwyn (Dag, who lives in Edenvale). Our house was situated across the street from Florida train station. My parents lived there until their passing. Grandad passed away 1962. My father passed away in 1986. Mom moved to flats just off Goldman Street and lived there until she passed away 1992.

My grandfather had lived in Florida for many years, prior to moving to the house with us on Shamrock Street, which already was +50 years old. He had lived in a house on **Goldman Street** – the main thoroughfare in Florida, where my father was born. My Mother was born in Roodepoort. My grandfather was originally from Germany. Mom's parents were from Poland or Russia.

Next to the house on Goldman Street, my grandfather had a 'doll's hospital' where a man repaired and made porcelain dolls. The window displays featured dolls dressed as nurses and doctors with a doll in a hospital bed. This was eventually sold, and shops were built there.



Goldman Street, Florida

My grandfather sold property on Goldman Street where the OK Bazaars was built. I'm not sure if it's still there. In the early 1970s the municipality wanted to widen the street and so our family donated part of their land on Goldman Street, to the municipality and for that they laid a corner stone named 'Hammerschlag Corner'. (My niece has that now)

My parents Bert and Clara Hammerschlag owned a toy/bicycle shop in Florida. This was the only place that sold and repaired bicycles. Each Christmas they would decorate the window and as my dad loved trains, a train would run around the track in the window to the delight of all residents in Florida.

My mom, Clara was the first Jewish president of the Florida Bowling Club as for many years the club would not accept Jews. She was also chairlady of the Women's Homecrafts which she started and meetings would be held at the Florida Town Hall. Each month there would be a demonstration, and competition for cakes, pies and knitting, to name some of the activities. Mom had the idea of putting a mirror on the ceiling so people at the back could see the displays. She was very involved in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and every year when a school fete was held, she raised the most money selling knitted items. They also published a cookbook, which I still have and use.

My brother and I attended Florida Primary School and Florida Park High. I was an avid tennis player and won the West Rand Championships under 13 -15-18 singles, doubles and mixed, for all the years and I played league for the Florida Lake Tennis Club

Simon Wolf, son of Barney's Biltong fame, who lived in Maraisburg, was in my class. Lionel Ludorf wasn't Jewish but he was my mixed tennis partner. (Lionel was the grandson of Judge Joseph Ludorf who presided over several cases involving Struggle activists).

The Dreyers owned the movie house, the Royal on Goldman Street. My parents were good friends with them and I can remember visiting them above the bioscope and going to movies and sitting on the floor. Also standing at the end of the movie to God save the Queen. And the awful smoking.

We used to go swimming at Florida public pool in the summer and took tap dancing lessons at the Florida Town Hall with Ms Lee. When I was five and a half I broke the running record at Florida Primary school. I still have the little dress that I ran in. The amazing thing was it had a number two on the back and then many years later I had twins.

I lived in Florida till I was 25 and then moved to Johannesburg, where I met Richard Potter in 1970. Richard was from London and he performed many times at the Florida Town Hall for the Dramatic Society. We married in 1972 at the Sunnyside Park Hotel and left South Africa in 1977. We emigrated to the USA with our twin sons Christopher and Gregory. In February 2019 the lovely house we lived in was sold and demolished. But memories of Florida will never be forgotten.

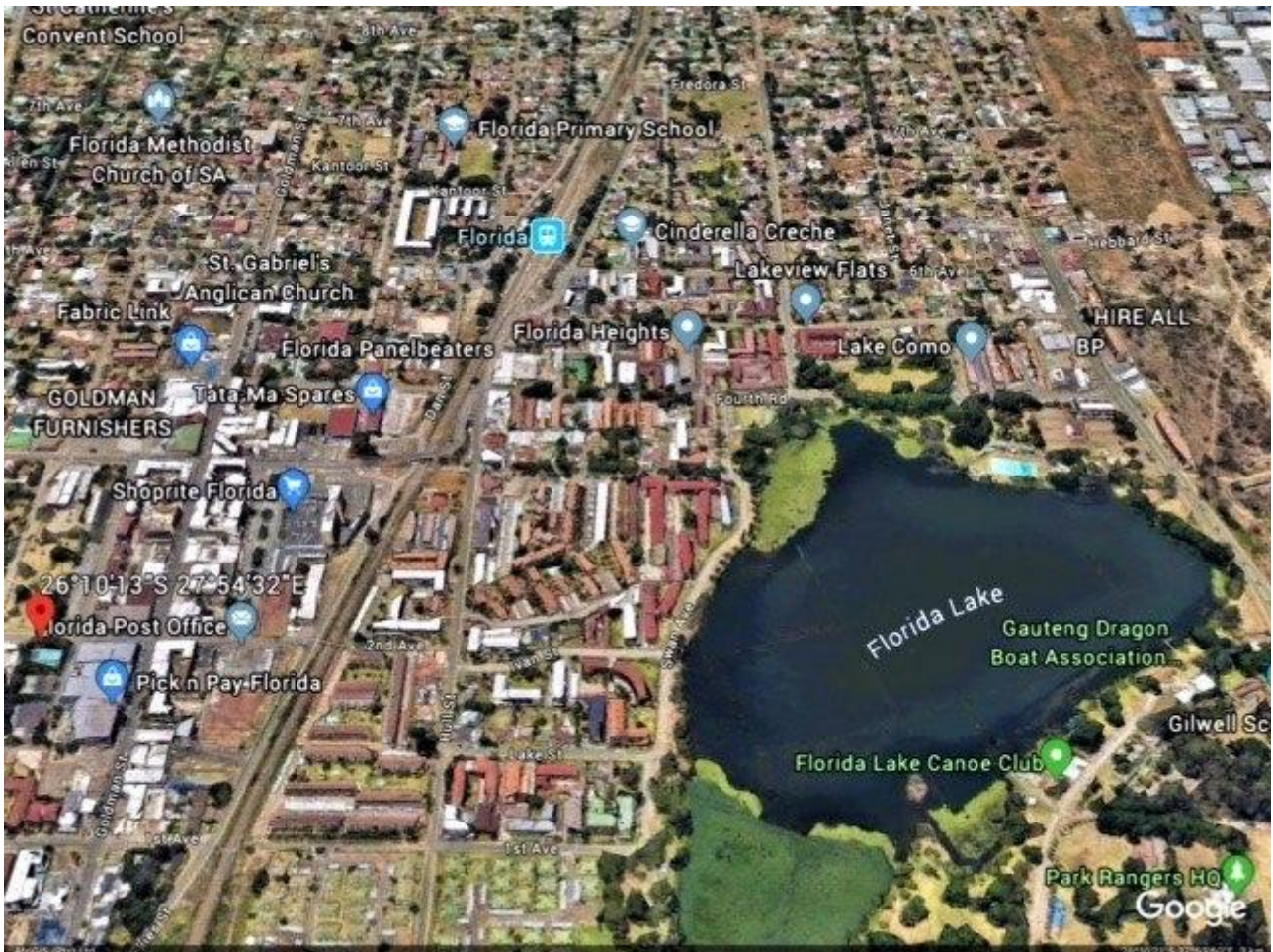
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## History of Florida

Florida, Gauteng is located along the Witwatersrand about 16 kilometres west of Johannesburg. The area which is referred to as Florida was originally established as the farm Vogelstruisfontein. Today, it is a suburb of Roodepoort.



The name 'Witwatersrand' means "ridge of white waters", but there are no prominent white waters around Johannesburg. The name refers to an optical illusion caused by quartzite, a white rock found on the Witwatersrand. Seen from a distance after rain, quartzite rocks look like glistening water. The rock also contains pyrite which is visible as gold specks, hence the name "fool's gold".



Vogelstruisfontein and the farms Roodepoort and Paardekraal were established as mining camps after the discovery of gold in 1881. The suburb was laid out in 1889 and then proclaimed the following year on 14 April 1890 and by 1904 became a suburb of Roodepoort.

Florida largely shares its origin with the birth of Roodepoort in general, with the township first taking shape in about 1888 after prospecting for gold had begun in the area in 1884 and public diggings declared in 1886. The surveyor who originally surveyed the township of Roodepoort, William Pritchard, was so impressed by the profusion of flowers in one particular valley that he decided to name it Florida, Spanish for flowers (some say that it was named after the suburb's originator Hendrik van Hoven whose late niece was called Florrie).

Florida Lake is a large area of water south of the railway line. It is flanked by residential properties to the north, and parklands to the east and west.

The main road through Florida, is Goldman Street. It forms the spine for local business activity and civic services. The local library is one of the best facilities of its kind in Johannesburg. The western end of Goldman Street is home to a number of antique dealers specialising in Africana furniture.

It was predominantly a dormitory town housing white employees of the mines, mainly the shift bosses and so forth, while the actual miners, workers, Africans and coloureds tended to live in



surrounding areas such as Roodepoort and Maraisburg. Later on in Florida's history it also became a main housing centre for railway employees, confirming its dormitory town origins and character. It was therefore an exclusively white area under apartheid. There was virtually no community mobilisation around apartheid, with Florida's residents being on the beneficial side of the status quo. However, the most significant racial change post-1994 was the entry of coloureds into Florida, with residents indicating that currently around 40 to 50% of Florida's population is coloured.

The areas above Goldman Street are middle class and below Goldman Street, lower-middle class below the railway line you find the working class. The main types of housing in Florida consist of free-standing houses as well as flats. The flats are primarily located below the railway line and the houses above it.



A couple of original stamp mills for extracting gold on display in Florida.

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**Story of the Hammerschlag family:** collected by Brian Josselowitz from their daughter Barbara Potter, USA, 2018

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