

Julius Meyer and Edith Bertha Kaplan's family story

Roodepoort / Florida

By Bernard Kaplan



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Above Bernard Kaplan aged about 7

Left: Bernard with his father Julius in front of their house in Janet Street Florida a few years earlier.  
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My father's family, from Krakes (Krok) Lithuania

My father **Julius Meyer Kaplan** (Yehuda Meir – or Yudel as he was then known) was born in 1907 in Krakes (Krok) Lithuania. His father, my paternal grandfather had studied at the famed Slobotka Yeshiva and became a *melamud* (a learned teacher) in the Talmud Torah in Krok.

At the time of the First World War, during the German occupation of Lithuania, the Jews of Krok were expelled to Poland, and the Talmud Torah was destroyed.

In addition, the Germans requisitioned all the carts and horses owned by Jews and they demanded money to purchase new horses and carts. My grandfather was severely beaten when he resisted. He died a year after the family returned from Poland. His wife, my paternal grandmother Breina had a store in Krakes.





On September 3, 1941, Breina and most of the family were murdered by the German einsatzgruppen and their Lithuanian collaborators. They massacred 1,125 Litvak Jews from three villages. Many were members of my family. They were buried in a mass grave in a forest near Krok.

Fortunately, one of his sisters, my aunt Rochkie and her daughter Shulamith, escaped Krok on a Soviet troop train to the Ural Mountains near a marker showing the divide between Europe and Asia. Rochkie was allowed to board the train because her husband Yankel Sharon had been conscripted into the Soviet army. Yankel Sharon was killed at Oryal,

USSR, and was buried in a common grave. Rochkie had been informed in a letter sent to them in Vilna after the war, that Yankel Sharon had been killed in action.

Rochkie placed Shulamith in an orphanage in Vilna after the war. A family friend found Rochkie scavenging for food in garbage cans. Another friend who had migrated to Johannesburg read my aunt's plea for information about her brother Yudel in the South African Jewish Times. After many years my parents helped my aunt and cousin to immigrate to Israel.

My father **Yudel Meir Kaplan** meantime had fortunately left Krok for South Africa in 1927. When **Yudel** arrived in Cape Town on 27 December 1927, he was met by his cousin **Louis Karpas** from Roodepoort. He was 20 years old and lived initially with another cousin in Yeoville. In Lithuania he'd trained to be a roofer. But in Johannesburg like so many other young men from *der heim*, he worked in mine concession stores owned by other Jews. Then in 1936, my father bought a shop on Kathleen Street Florida between the Bantjes gold mine and the Florida Lake. He initially lived in the storeroom of the shop before moving to Fossets Hotel across the lake.

My Mother's Family: Mossel Bay via Shavil and Oudtshoorn

Edith Bertha Noach, my mother, was born in South Africa in 1917 in Mossel Bay, Cape Province. Her father Rafal Noach came from Shavil, Lithuania, to Oudtshoorn in the 1890s to work on an ostrich farm. He subsequently settled in Mossel Bay where he had a store on George Road. Her mother, my maternal grandmother, Yetta née Perelman, was born in Marijampolė, Lithuania, and came to Johannesburg with her family in 1907. My mother lodged with Yetta's sister, her aunt Ray and her husband Joe Ben in Mayfair and worked at the Kazerne depot. A third sister of Yetta, **Janie Milunsky** and her husband **Harry Milunsky**, had a small grocery shop near the Florida railway station.



On a visit to her aunt Janie, Edith was directed to my father's shop to sell him a ticket to a dance to raise funds to build a new shul in Fordsburg for Uncle Joe. My father Julius said that he would buy a ticket only if Edith were to accompany him. 'But I already have a date' she protested. My father was clearly extremely charming and persuasive. She cancelled her date and went with my father. They married soon after in 1940.



The wedding picture: of Edith Noach and Julius Kaplan on July 7th 1940 at the Berea synagogue.

L-R Anita Noach, Gerald Noach, Gertie and Louis Karpas, Edith, Julius, Hymie Tucker, Ethne Saks, Yetta and Raphael Noach.

Anita Noach and Gerald Noach - Edith's first cousins

Gertie and Louis Karpas - Louis was Julius first cousin

Ethne Saks - Edith's cousin. Became an opera singer.

Yetta and Raphael Noach - Edith's parents from Mossel Bay. The man next to Julius was his relative Hymie Tucker.

Julius and Edith Kaplan set up home in Florida on Rose Street, and a while later moved to Janet Street. Edith's brother **Robert Noach** and sister **Thelma Noach** boarded with them.



I, (**Bernard Kaplan**) was born in 1941 at the Frangwen nursing home in Hillbrow. My sister **Lynette (Rubin)** was born at home in 1944 and my brother **Brian Kaplan** was born in 1948 at the Princess Nursing Home, Hillbrow.

Brian, Lynette and Bernard
c1956

My father **Julius Kaplan's** store on Kathleen Street was next to a bicycle shop. My mother helped him in the shop. Some of the men who worked for my father over the years were Pencil, George, Tomato, and Gabriel. I never knew their real names but

vividly remember going with my father along rutted roads to Pencil's house in Soweto.

My father taught me to understand that African mine workers were paid so poorly that six pence for them was equivalent to ten shillings for us. He taught me to respect everyone and to try to put myself in the shoes of the poorest black person. Once, when my mother and father were walking to their car from a cinema, he saw a black man shivering in the rain. He wordlessly took off his jacket, draped it over the man's shoulders and kept on walking.



My father insisted that I supervise the shop for two weeks each summer year from when I was 15 to when I was an intern. He insisted that I would learn more in the shop than at medical school! He'd been pistol whipped by shop lifters and the shop was robbed on numerous occasions. So much so that I carried a pistol when I was in the shop but knew that I was more likely to shoot myself than to defend against a

criminal. Initially my parents struggled to make a living but managed to save and take care of us. Eventually, they built Jules Court on Goldman Street and owned Edlyn Court on 6th Avenue, Florida.

Jewish life in Florida



The Kaplan house on Janet Street

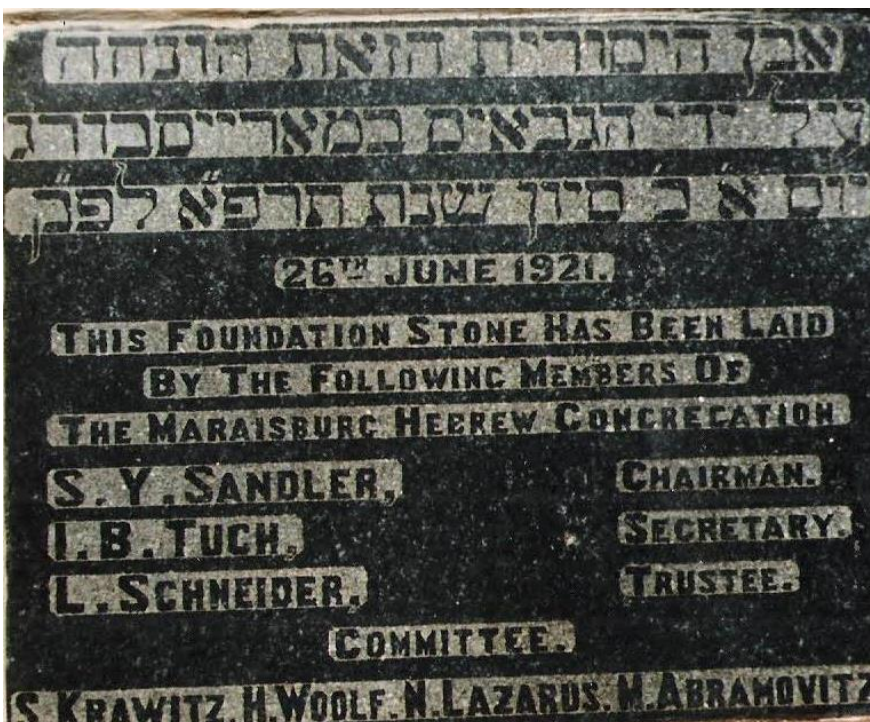
Surprisingly, Janet Street had the most Jewish families, although not all at the same time: the **Queits** at #1 and and their relatives the **Queits** at #60 Janet Street.

Boots Sandler, the **Levines** (one daughter

died suddenly in childhood), a physician who worked at Durban Deep Mine, the **Kaplans** and the **Jacobsons** all lived on that street. **Rae Jacobson** taught piano and Isaac was a storekeeper. **Sandra Queit** now lives in Cape Town. **Clive Queit** became a well-known mineral dealer in Southern Africa. Clive used to live in Tsumeb (Namibia) in 'the good old days' and he now divides his time between Australia and South Africa. **Martin Jacobson**, whose sister was Jillian, became a psychiatrist and emigrated to Australia. A mine physician also lived in Janet Street. What was also unusual was that four people on our little block became doctors – myself, **Heather Crewe-Brown**, **Andre van der Walt** and **Martin Jacobson**. **Aubrey** and **Cyril Milunsky**, and **Farrel Spiro** who had started life in Florida, also became doctors.

The Maraisburg Shul.

The little shul in Maraisburg was the centre of Jewish communal activity.



The congregation was established in about 1910 and the shul was built in 1921, situated behind the Zidel's hardware store next to the Crown Mines golf course.

The foundation stone of the Maraisburg Shul

Most of the Florida and Maraisburg Jews worshipped at this little shul on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. There were Friday night services and daily services if needed for mourning or *yahrzeits*, but not regular Saturday services.



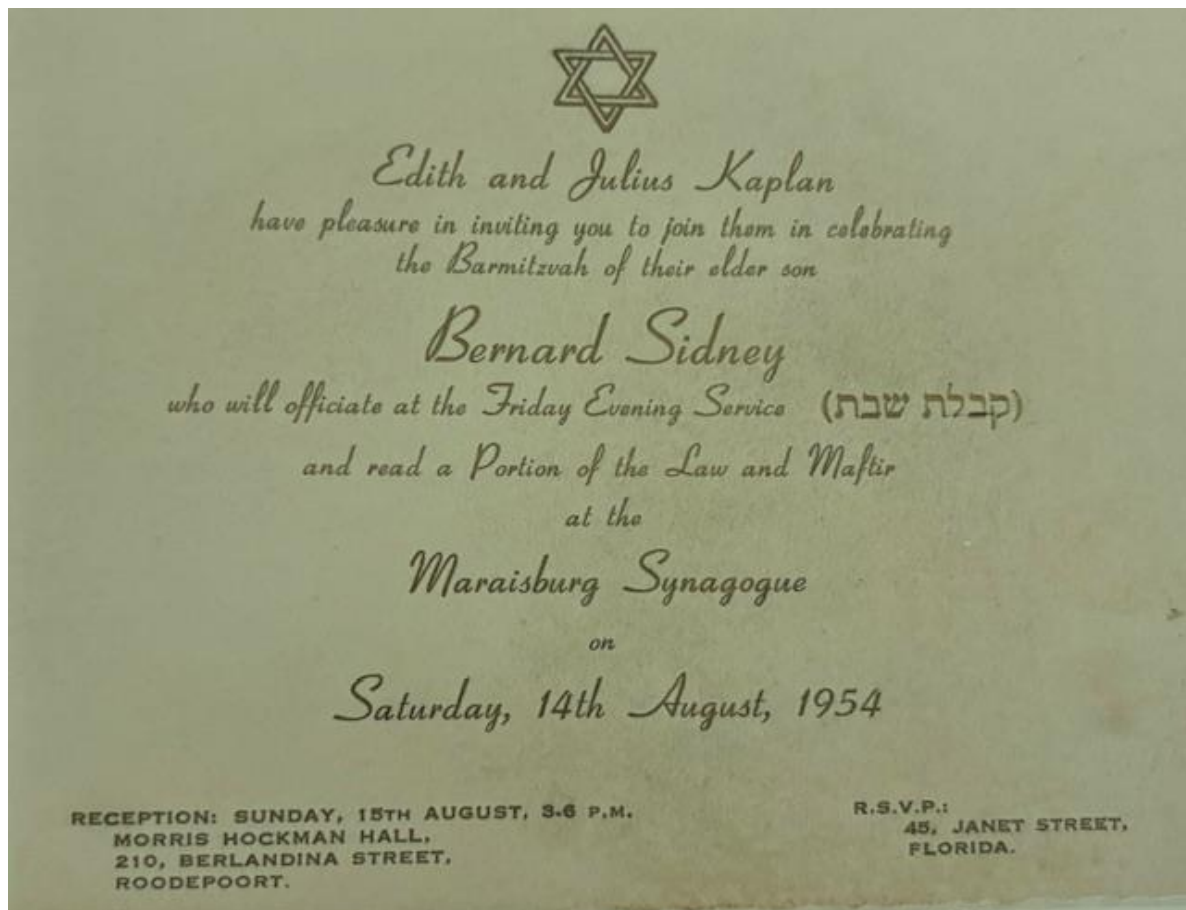
Benne Osrin the pharmacist never came and **Dr Sabse Spiro** and attorney **Gus Ackerman** preferred going to Roodepoort despite living in Florida. The minyan was made up by those who sat *eiben oof* (in the front row) – **Mr Galansky** (eating house) **Sam Zidel** (hardware store) **Morris Rubinstein** (jeweller and watchmaker) **Julius Kaplan** (storekeeper) **Mr Shubitz** from Discovery, the **Dreyers**, father and son Leon (owners of the Royal Bioscope on Goldman Street, Florida) **Mr Phillip Queit** (storekeeper) **Dr Morrie Jacobson** (general practitioner) **Boots Sandler** (storekeeper) **Mr Lifschitz** (pharmacist and **Mr Harberer** (manager of the Maraisburg Hotel who supplied the sodas to break the fast. **Mr Bernstein** (businessman), and the **Milunskys**. the four **Wolf brothers Barney, Stanley, Ernest and Porky** (shop keepers and Porky the butcher who made delicious biltong) After services on the first day of Rosh Hashanah their mother **Sarah Wolf** invited the congregation to a kiddush at her home in Maraisburg. Barney Wolf's wife **Ida Wolf**, was an opera singer. (**Lena Schubitz, Bertha Rubinstein** and **Rae Jacobson** were my mother's closest friends.)

I have nostalgic memories of the little shul in Maraisburg nestled between the golf course of the adjacent mine and the last row of houses of the town. We went each Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur from my early childhood to past my bar mitzvah. My closest Jewish friends growing up were **David Rubinstein** and **Leon Rubinstein**. We boys spent most of the time playing outside. Sometimes, with just ten to fifteen men attending, if one man needed to use the lavatory in the back yard, the service would have to be halted until he returned.

My dear Uncle **Harry Milunsky** conducted the morning services. (Harry's wife was my mother's aunt, Janie). In the year before my Barmitzvah, I conducted the Kabbalat Shabbat and Ma'ariv services most Friday nights when Boots Sandler was saying Kaddish for his mother.

Each year the congregation would scrape together money to hire an itinerant chazzan or rabbi to conduct the High Holyday services. I only remember Rabbi Dr Abt, firstly because his tallit and shofar were stolen, and secondly because he married Paige and me at the Oxford Shul. Dr Abt seemed so lugubrious, but I remember him smiling when he asked me why the *chatan* (bridegroom) crushes the glass at the wedding ceremony. I replied that Freud had suggested that it symbolised the breaking of the hymen. 'That may be what Freud thought', he replied, 'but we believe it symbolises the destruction of the temple'. Mmm.... This has never made much sense to me. The Chabad explanation goes into more detail but like so many rituals the true reason remains opaque especially to modern secular Jews.

When I was eleven my dad Julius announced that henceforth I would go to shul in Roodepoort every Saturday. This was because there were seldom Saturday morning services in Maraisburg and to prepare me for my Barmitzvah. I took the train from Florida Station past the Hamburg



and Georgia stations to the Roodepoort Train Station. The return ticket cost about one shilling and six pence. I loved window-shopping at the Indian stores on the way to the shul which was past the Roodepoort Town Hall and Primary School.

Harry Milunsky, Morris Rubinstein and my father **Julius Kaplan** had created a cheder to prepare their sons for Barmitzvah. They hired **Reverend Dick**, a shochet, to teach us to read and write Hebrew, recite the Schema and Amida, and learn our maftir and haftorah. We each attended for half an hour on Thursday afternoons at the Florida primary school. Going to

cheder was often hazardous – I was beaten up several times because I was Jewish. My siddur was thrown on the ground and damaged. Rev Dick also taught me to conduct the Kabbalat and Friday evening service.

My Barmitzvah was celebrated at the **Maraisburg Shul** on a Saturday morning and the reception was held in the **Morris Hockman Hall**, in nearby **Roodepoort**, on the Sunday afternoon



Family portrait at the time of my Barmitzvah, August 1954 Brian Lynette Edith Julius and Bernard

We had searched for Dr Abt's stolen relics in the gullies and caverns of the mine dumps created from mine tailings that were piled up in the search for gold. The dumps were behind the shul and the caverns were produced by years of erosion but Rabbi Abt's stolen property was never found. I think that he had brought his precious tallit from Germany. (It never occurred to me until now, that we had taken it for granted that Africans (then Natives) were the thieves and not the whites of apartheid Maraisburg.

My father, Yehudah Meyer Ben Baruch Schlomo Ha-Cohen loved to hear the *chazzonos* (cantorial music) and to get the first *Aliyah* (honour of being called up to read from the *Torah*. He really loved to *duchen* - to recite the priestly blessing (a special honour for those who belong to the Cohanim or priestly group, as we did). Because this had to be done without shoes, every year a chorus of men would taunt him – did you wash your feet? Did you change your socks? He compelled me to *duchen* with him once, but after that I refused and would leave shul when the *duchening* began.

My mother hated going to shul because, she told me many years later, she did not like the clothes pageant. Women sat at the back separated from the men by a low wooden wall. Each could see the others.

Even though the community got even smaller, most of the Jews of Florida resisted amalgamating with the nearby somewhat larger Roodepoort Hebrew Congregation. 'Amalgamation' was a word that resounded negatively through our house because my dad Julius Kaplan was dead-set against it. He and **Morris Rubinstein, Sam Zidel, Mr Galansky** and the **Wolf brothers** and others wanted to maintain their own little Shul.

Roodepoort was a metropolis compared to Florida, though Florida was thought to be posher. It was the civic centre of our area. We obtained our driving licences in Roodepoort and visited the Durban Deep Mines to enjoy the mine dancers who performed one Sunday a month. When I was arrested for a traffic infraction while riding 'two abreast' on my bicycle I was summoned to the traffic court in Roodepoort. The officer alluded to the fact that I was Jewish. The Florida Jews had many ties to Roodepoort. My Barmitzvah was celebrated at the Maraisburg Shul in 1954, but the reception was held at the Morris Hockman Hall. Once a year for several years the whole Jewish community enjoyed the hospitality of the Bachers at Bacher's farm. Their son Ali Bacher was a medical student in Paige's class at Wits. He kept wicket for Transvaal and South Africa and became the captain of one of South Africa's best cricket teams.

I wish that I could remember why **Kaplan, Rubinstein** and **Zidel** hated the idea of joining the Roodepoort congregation.



The Roodepoort synagogue left and the Maurice Hockman Talmud Torah and hall adjacent on the right

Something terrible must have happened in 1956 as I was packed off to my Aunty Janie so that I could go to shul in Greenside. I spent most of the time outside the shul, talking to Ochie Frank, a cousin of Miriam and Arlene Stoppelman from Roodepoort. (Ochie became an Obstetrician and rented rooms in my father's building, Jules Court, on Goldman Street Florida. Miriam married Farrell Spiro who became an extremely successful interventional radiologist in Johannesburg. Arlene and I dated a few times - she was beautiful and sadly died at 44 years.)

Several years ago, I met **Ian Zidel**, the grand-son of **Sam Zidel** from Maraisburg, at a relative's wedding in Miami. Ian, now an advocate in Johannesburg, grew up in Florida and was head boy at King David. Sam Zidel had three children (I can't remember Sam's wife's name). The children were Mavis, Ian's father Gerald, and Ronnie. Ronnie started a *Betar chug* (revisionist Zionist youth group) in Florida and that is why, in 1950, David Rubinstein and I went to *Betar machaneh* in Hout Bay. That is where I saw Menachem Begin and took a dislike to him because his face frightened me. I now consider him to be an amazing, if flawed, man, having visited the Museum honouring him in Jerusalem and the fort where he was imprisoned in Vilnius, Lithuania.

In 1992 in San Antonio, Texas, I met **Mr Swartzman**, the father of a colleague Dr Sheila Swartzman. He told me that his father had been a founder member of the Maraisburg shul and his family had attended the Maraisburg shul in the years before the war.

Something must then have been resolved, because I remember attending the Roodepoort shul for the High Holidays with my family for a few years. On one occasion, Afrikaners yelling anti-Semitic nonsense drove by in a bakkie. I yelled back at them and was rewarded for this with a stern scolding from my father. **Dr Sabse Spiro** had seen me and told my father that I was jeopardising the Jewish community. After 1960 I stopped going to shul.

Keeping Kosher and family life

Keeping kosher was quite difficult. We bought our kosher meat in Johannesburg. On Saturday afternoons we'd trek to buy goodies at Crystal Bakery on Beit Street Doornfontein. I think that Crystals was open on a Saturday.

We kept egg-laying chickens in our back yard and my father taught me how to slaughter and kosher a chicken. We also had about 50 fruit trees in our garden. I loved growing vegetables and working in the garden. There was a huge and bountiful apricot tree. It was said that it 'relieved constipation', especially if large quantities were eaten before they were completely ripe. Even then I could not wait for fruit to ripen. 'Don't eat those apricots' Anna van der Walt admonished her son Andre. 'But Bernard is eating them', he protested. 'Ya,' she said, 'but he has cast iron pipes for intestines.'

My mother had two sets of dinnerware, utensils and pots and pans for everyday use; one for *milchig* (milky) and one for *fleishig* (meaty) and two sets for Pesach. I did not know anyone in Florida who was strictly shomer Shabbat. Most businesses needed to be open on Saturday mornings. Nor did I know any Jews who ate *chazer* (pork) or forbidden sea food. We were closer to the Conservative tradition than true orthodox.

We celebrated Pesach each year at our house and my aunty Thelma's house in Greenside. My grandmother Yetta, two aunts and uncles and cousins were always present. From the age of 16, I 'spoiled' some Seders by arguing with my beloved uncle Max about apartheid. Aside from asking the Four Questions, and eating too much, none of the children participated or were brought into the conversation. We were kept home from school for the first two and last two days of Jewish holidays.

My parents had a deep sense of family, so that Saturday and Sunday afternoons were spent with my grandmother, aunts and other relatives in Johannesburg. But on many Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings I had to help my father fix up things in the shop. He talked

non-stop about his shtetl and his adventures with his *landsleit*, especially the **Tuckers**. Working in mining concession stores had not been easy, especially when he'd worked for **Gavronsky**, (**Helen Suzman's** father). He spoke Yiddish a lot of the time and I answered in English.

Jewish Businesses in Florida

I remember **Morris Sewitz**, the outfitters, it was called Morrie's as I recall; his wife was **Sonia**, and **Greenberg's Outfitters**. I recall **Leon Dreyer's** cinema in Florida where we saw many memorable films on Saturday afternoons. Leon took over the cinema from his father. Jewish-owned businesses on Goldman Street, Florida were **The Royal Theatre, Rubenstein's Jewellery, Osrin's chemist, Adcock's Chemist (Mr Lifschitz), Geffen Clothing, the Marcus family**, and later the **OK Bazaars**. The **Milunskys** owned a grocery store south of Florida Station nearby the hotel managed by the **Goldberg family**. Adcock's was owned by the **Tannenbaum family** from Krugersdorp originally from Roodepoort. **Sam Zidel** owned a very successful hardware store in Maraisburg.

Our local Florida chemist shop was owned by **Mr Niss** and then **Mr Fineberg**. **Louis and Gertie Karpas's** gift and novelty shop was next door to **Herson's** pharmacy (originally **Boner's** pharmacy) on Van Wyk Street, Roodepoort. **Dr Sabse Spiro** was part-owner of the tallest building in Roodepoort.

We had very little interaction with Jews from Krugersdorp and Randfontein, except for some combined Habonim events. On one of these I met **David Maltz** who many years later became our dentist in Narberth near our home in Merion Pa. When David retired his daughter Leigh-Anne became our dentist.

My Education – being a Jew

Mrs Falk operated a kindergarten in a house that was diagonally behind ours. I was dispatched there at age 5 to be taught to read and write.

On the way to my first day at the Florida Primary School in August 1947 my mother told me that the apartheid government was treating 'Natives' the same way as the Germans had treated the Jews. I didn't know what Jews meant.

Soon after starting school, Mickey a neighbour in grade 2 who lived up the road, started chanting that 'Kaplan is a Jew – let's clout him!'. Many years later my father Julius told me that Mickey's father and two other gentlemen on our street were anti-Semites. Two boys in the playground discussed the fact that the Jews were the only nation that did not have a land of their own. I was often bullied verbally and physically and called a bloody Jew, but never by my Christian friends. Only one teacher ever made anti-Semitic comments to me.

Unfortunately, I had to attend Bible lessons every day for an hour from Grade 1 to Standard 6. The first half of each year was enjoyable because we learnt about my heroes Moses, David, and Sampson. But after the July break things were almost unbearable, especially when we were taught that the Jews killed Jesus. Ebenezer Vermeulen, the son of an Apostolic Dominee bullied me for years and on one occasion rose in class to say that the Jews killed Jesus. Let's kill Kaplan, he yelled, because he's a Jew. The teacher told him to sit down. In 1956 during the

after-glow of the Suez Crises, I challenged him to a fight. He nearly killed me, but I managed to choke him into unconsciousness – neither he nor anyone else ever bullied me again. I did not tell my parents.

High School

I attended the English section of the **Florida High School** before it became the Florida Hoer Skool. English-speaking pupils were taught in asbestos classrooms until we moved to our own new school in **Florida Park** where I became a prefect. Except for Inkie Mervitz whose father was Jewish, I was the only Jewish kid in my classes from the day I started primary school till the day I graduated from high school. In fact, when I started primary school in 1947 there were only two other Jewish pupils in the school - my cousin **Aubrey Milunsky** and **David Rubinstein**. An antisemitic teacher treated David extremely badly. David became an accountant and emigrated to Australia. His brother Leon took over his father's business and had a boutique on the Blue Train. Years later **Sandra Queit**, **Mrs Liebman** and my sister, **Lynette Kaplan** taught at the Florida Primary School. **Mrs Blieden** taught at the Florida Park High school.

My non-Jewish friends: **In primary school** I was a member of Malcom's gang. I was the only Jew. Not once did they ever bully me or insult me for being Jewish. They were daredevils. We played on the mine dump near my father's shop, went down the abandoned Bantjes mine, made a fooffy slide that was attached to two blue gum trees. We dug dugouts and got up to endless mischief like crawling along the underground storm drains in Florida. Andre van der Walt was my neighbour and blood brother. His parents treated my siblings and me as though we were their children. Mr van der Walt was a Dopper and a Nationalist who patiently explained the



rationale for apartheid to me when I was a teenager. The van der Walts and I listened to every election result broadcast by the SABC from 1952. When an attempt was made on the life of Verwoerd at the Rand Easter Show, my father went to offer Mr. van der Walt his sympathy and support. I yelled at my father for doing this, but he told me that one day I would understand. **In high school** Clarence Dreyer, a devout Christian with whom I still correspond, became my closest friend.

Bernard, right of Mrs Stein, Grade 8 Florida High School. Ian (Inky) Merwitz is third on Mrs Stein's left.

Activity and entertainment in Florida /Maraisburg

In the early days after the war the Jewish families were very active with card evenings and other social events. They helped to raise money for the construction of the **Morris Hockman Hall**. In

Roodepoort. Most supported Zionism and Israel. I accompanied my mother to a fund-raising event at Aunty **Janie Milunsky**'s house in 1947 or 1948. Aunty Janie and Uncle Harry had three children – Aubrey, who became a famous geneticist in Boston, Joyce also in Boston and Cyril a radiologist in Delaware. The family moved from Florida to Greenside in the 1950s.

Habonim

My father wept when we listened to the SABC announce that the United Nations voted in support of Israel. The very next day my father Julius took me at age seven to Roodepoort to join *Hashtilim* (the younger section of *Habonim*) (a Zionist youth movement).

Joe Samuel and his sister **Debbie** were the *madrichim* (youth leaders). **Brian Tannenbaum**, **Hessel Samuel**, the **Josmans** (especially the orphan twins **Geoffrey and Sheba**) and **Arthur Simon** were in the *chug* (group) which met in the newly constructed Morris Hockman Hall next door to the Roodepoort shul. Hessie and I signed up to go to *machaneh* (summer camp) in 1954, but this was cancelled because of a polio epidemic. Then Hessie died, after being involved in a fight. I remember that Mr Samuel's hair turned white, and I can still see him saying *Kaddish* (memorial prayer) for Hessie

I subsequently attended about five *machanot* in Leaches Bay and Gonubie near East London, and at Somerset West. **Habonim** was magical for me. I still correspond regularly with Ralph Freedman, Saul Issroff and Raymond Aronson whom I met at camps and then at medical school.



Habonim Machaneh, Leaches Bay Dec 1956. My cousin Aubrey Milunsky is in the middle of the front row with moustache.

After the Florida/Maraisburg congregation amalgamated with the Roodepoort Hebrew Congregation, I used the abandoned Maraisburg shul for my *Habonim* group. I removed the wooden partition. This revealed a genizah of old discarded prayer books. But it also resulted in a tongue lashing from my father's friend Morris Rubenstein who said that I had desecrated the shul. Sometime after we left South Africa the shul was demolished.

Uncle Joe Ben

My maternal uncle, Aunty Rae's husband **Joe Ben**, insisted on building a synagogue in Fordsburg, because, according to family lore, he wanted to be a *gabbai* (warden) and was prevented from doing so at the nearby Mayfair Synagogue. Joe Ben was born in Salant, Lithuania in 1894, and became one of the foremost Jewish communal workers. He came to South Africa in 1913.

He took a particular interest in Hebrew Education and became Chairman of the Fordsburg Talmud Torah and Lomdei Torah in 1925. He was associated with the Jewish Helping Hand and Burial Society (Chevra Kadisha) for 25 years and was also a Trustee of the Witwatersrand Jewish Old Age Home. I remember being taken reluctantly to his house for shiva in 1955. This was the first time that I had been allowed to visit family during shiva and it left an indelible impression on me. I can see family members sitting on low benches and the draped mirrors and photographs.

When I was about 16 my father and I joined the *landsleit* from Krok in the Houghton home of one of the Rezniks who were butchers. Every man rose to recite the Kaddish for their butchered family members. (Reznik is the Russian word for butcher)."

The Tornado, 26 November 1948

I remember looking out of our dining room window towards the south-west one day and seeing a terrible black cloud that turned out to be the 1948 tornado. A few days later I went with my dad to



see **Louis and Gertie Karpas** whose roof had been lifted a few inches off the walls. However their house was protected by the church, a house away. The church was destroyed.

I remember feeling sorry for **Rica and**

Issie Joss whose house had been badly damaged. Their son **Brian Josselowitz** had polio and Rica had recently given birth to his sister **Jennifer**. Issie had four sisters **Dora Cohen**, Phil's wife, **Minnie Herson** who lived in Roodepoort, **Ida Miller** who lived in Mafeking and **Gertie Karpas** – married to my uncle Louis Karpas – who lived opposite Issie and Rica in Georgia and. Dad adored Gertie who with uncle Louis had taught him to speak English and changed his

name from 'Yudel' to 'Julius'.) Aunty Gertie loved Paige. She gave her a sapling which we planted in our garden in Snell Drive, Florida Park. Gertie named a tree 'Paige' but Paige and I cannot remember the details.

My uncle **Louis Karpas** had travelled to Cape Town to meet Dad, then called Yudel in 1927. They were first cousins. Uncle **Phil Cohen** taught Dad table manners and etiquette because Dad was a 'greener'.

Julius Kaplan. Proud member of the Roodepoort Bowling Club



Memories of the Second World War

I have vivid memories from my early childhood included seeing fighter planes flying over our house in about 1945, watching the coast guard boats patrolling in Mossel Bay, and food rationing.

I grew up in the shadow of Tobruk and El Alamein and remember going to Roodepoort with Malcolm Lewis and Brian Falk to see 'The Desert Fox' - the film about Rommel. Malcolm's



father had been a sergeant major up North and suffered, as I now realise, from PTSD. I also remember my dad begging Chief Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz to give the get for Rose Karpas whose husband had died in the Mediterranean when his ship went down. (Later Rose married Wilfred Kavonic who farmed tobacco in the then Southern Rhodesia now Zimbabwe).

I remember going with Dad in 1945 or 1946 to the Roodepoort station to wave as Issie Joss's troop train went by slowly. I am sure that I can remember him leaning out of the window. I wish I'd known more about where exactly he'd fought in North Africa in the desert. Maybe I was told and forgot.

(Issie Joss wrote a War Diary including his PoW experiences. It has been uploaded it on the CHOL website on the Memoirs page – along with other similar memoirs <https://chol.website/memoirs.htm>) Issie wrote this postcard to Bernard's family saying 'Tons of love, Issie'.

My mother's cousin, **Chaim Sacks** joined MACHAL to fight for Israel in the War of Independence in 1948. His sister Ethne and his son Gideon Saks were opera singers.)

Medical school 1959 to 1964

After school I studied Medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand from 1959 to 1964. I was an Intern/registrar at Coronation, Baragwanath and The Transvaal Memorial Hospitals. I then became a Fellow of the South African College of Medicine, in Paediatrics and took a Diploma in Paediatrics. My Fellowship was at the Montreal Children's and Royal Victoria Hospital from 1970 to 1975. American degrees followed: American Boards of Paediatrics and paediatric Nephrology.

My Professional career in Pediatric Nephrology in Canada, USA and UK

Chief of the Renal Service (MCH) and Director of Residency Training, Professor of Pediatrics, McGill University. The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and The University of Pennsylvania from 1987 to 2016. Director of Paediatric Nephrology, Chief of the Medical Staff, fellow in the Bioethics Center of University of Pennsylvania. Professor of Paediatrics and Medicine University of Pennsylvania. Locum Tenens, the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London 1985. Achievements Established the Renal Dialysis Unit and Kidney Transplant Program at CHOP. Contributed to the understanding and treatment of the Hemolytic Uremic Syndromes and Cystic Kidney Diseases.

My Family

My sister Lynette Rubin and her husband **Arnold Rubin** live in Ramat Beit Shemesh. They made Aliyah in 1988. My mother accompanied them but then moved to Toronto to live with Brian and Linda. She died at 86 years. Their daughter Arlene and her husband Rabbi Yehuda Greenman from Fort Worth, Texas, live in Ramat Bet Shemesh and have eight children. Their son Tzvi (Howard) is married to Shaina (Jeanne) and live in Teltz Stone. They have five children. Lynette and Arnold have more than ten great-grandchildren.

My brother Brian Kaplan married **Linda Hurwitz**. They have three children, Shayne, Craig and Jodie and five grandchildren. They immigrated to Toronto in 1986.

I met **my wife Paige Berman** who lived in Greenside, at Wits Medical School in 1961. We were classmates and married in 1964. We lived for a year in the doctor's residence in Hillbrow, then at Baragwanath Hospital and Florida Park. Paige graduated with a BSc and MBBCh and completed her internship at Baragwanath Hospital. In Montreal she became a paediatrician and paediatric geneticist and obtained the FRC Peds. and degrees in Genetics. Paige became a world expert on Williams Syndrome and Gaucher Disease. Our children are Michele who lives in Montreal, Canada with Claudio and Aria. Alon lives in Asheville, North Carolina, USA and has three daughters, Saffron, Bindi and Jamie.

My cousin Aubrey Milunsky is a medical geneticist in Cambridge, MA. He received his medical degree from University of the Witwatersrand in 1960 and has been in practice since then. He specializes in clinical genetics and is experienced in molecular genetics and genetics & the law. He is the author of numerous books, chapters and original articles.

My sister Lynette Kaplan (Rubin) (born 1944) in conversation with me remembers

Dr Jock Beron, who grew up with his family in Roodepoort, was the principal of Roodepoort Primary School for many years. He had served in the army during the Second World War and on returning home had studied to obtain a PhD. He was an excellent principal, and the school had an excellent reputation.”

I remember Boots Sandler telling us that he was called ‘Boots’ because of his big feet. (We all thought his nickname was ‘Butch’.)

In the early years, **Mr Queit's** brother lived at the bottom of Janet Street, and his son was **Selwyn**. The doctor who worked on the mine was also doing research into cancer. They had a son who came to Habonim. He was very quiet. A doctor who owned that big garage as you drove into Roodepoort on the left-hand side worked at Rand Leases Mines. The Langs owned a concession store near **Mr Queit's** shop on Rand Leases Mine property. We used to visit an old lady **Mrs Hoddes** who lived near Crown Mines. The shop of the Woolf brothers was also near Crown Mines. **Dr Marcus** worked at Crown Mines. The Berelowtz family had a garage in Roodepoort. They moved to Mowbray Road and Jannie was in Paige's class. Sadly, he was killed in a car accident in 1959. His sister Pauline lives in Melbourne. **The Kleins** also had a garage in Roodepoort. **Herbert Klein** became an orthopaedic surgeon. Paige and Bernard met his daughter **Denise Klein**, PhD, Professor of Neurology and Neurosurgery, in Montreal. Bernard sat next to Herman's cousin Julian in first year medicine. Julian became a psychiatrist at Yale.

Epilogue

It broke my father's heart when I told him that we emigrating to Canada. He said ‘you will not leave. You will not take my grandchildren away from me. I have built a life here. You will not speak about this again.’ Nine months later he and my mother arrived in Montreal and stayed for nearly six months. Four years later he said - why were you so clever? Promise me two things - help your brother's family come to Canada (they live in Toronto) and make a Barmitzvah for Alon. My father had two favourite songs - *Bei mir bits du shein* - and *remember you're a Jew my son*.

Bernard Kaplan after saying a silent Kaddish at his family's mass grave in the forest near Krok.



Bernard Kaplan says:

I am grateful to my sister Lynette for sharing 80 years of love, sibship, friendship, and memories. Our father taught us by his example to take care of family. This memoir is dedicated to him. I am also deeply indebted to my wife Paige and to the late Brian Joss for their encouragement to write my story. Geoff Boner and Geraldine Auerbach have been persistent, patient and helpful .

Nostalgia: I do live my life forward, but sometimes I can't help thinking about the past, and it is rewarding. Nostalgia makes me feel that my life had roots and continuity. It makes me feel good about myself and my relationships. It provides a texture to my life and gives me strength to move forward.

As noted in an article in The New York Times, nostalgia does have its painful side. It is a bittersweet emotion, but the net effect is to make life seem more meaningful, and death less frightening. When people speak wistfully of the past, they typically become more optimistic and inspired about the future.

Here are some pictures of my garden in Merion PA 18 July 2024.



Since 1987 Paige and I have lived in Merion PA in an extraordinary neighbourhood. We retired in 2016 and for relaxation garden, read, travel and write. Here are some of the results of our gardening.



The Kaplan Family Story

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