

Roodepoort: Queit and Geffen Family

From Sandra (née Queit) Johannesburg 2018

updated and edited 2025

Sandra (née Queit) and Barry

Barry and Sandra (Queit) Geffen were stalwarts of the Roodepoort Florida Hebrew Congregation. Barry was treasurer and then chairman and presided over the shul's 100th anniversary in 2005.

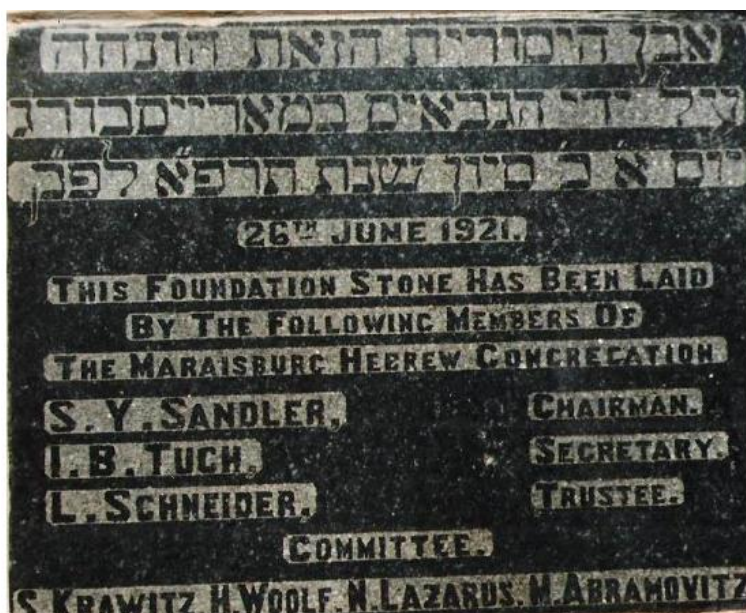
Sandra's parents the Queits – Lily (nee Hofman) born in Doornfontein and Phillip Queit (from Lithuania) were stalwarts of the Maraisburg shul. Sandra was born in the Florence Nightingale Nursing Home in Johannesburg

Sandra (nee Queit) lived in Florida all her life. She and her parents Lily and Philip and brother Clive (who now divides his time between Australia and Johannesburg) were members of the Maraisburg Hebrew Congregation, which like most small shuls, eventually closed. Clive was the last person to have his Barmitzvah there, which, said Sandra, was a memorable occasion.

Maraisburg had a small Jewish community. Members included the Rubensteins, the Zidels, the Kaplans and the Queits. (Members didn't much like the neighbouring big brother Roodepoort shul for reasons which have been forgotten in the mists of time. Sandra's mom, Lily, did a lot of fundraising for the Maraisburg shul and Sandra remembers that a lot of women used to come to their house and knit socks and other items for the soldiers on the front-line during World War Two.

Sandra remembered. 'The Maraisburg shul was the cutest shul, and it was next to the Consolidated Main Reef (CMR) golf course. Not far from the shul was the Killarney Hotel owned by a Jewish man and for many years he used to send drinks after Yom Kippur.'

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 Woolf 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 Woolf invited the congregation to a kiddush at her home in Maraisburg. Barney Woolf's wife Ida Woolf, was an opera singer. (Lena Schubitz, Bertha Rubinstein and Rae Jacobson were my mother's closest friends.)



Members had 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. 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.

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**Sandra's husband Barry Geffen** was born in Springs: his father, Lazar Geffen, had arrived from Lithuania and his mother, Sarah Salkow, was born in Benoni. Barry practiced as an optometrist in Roodepoort for many years and he met Sandra, a teacher at Florida Primary School, at a friend's house where they were invited to play scrabble. When she retired and eventually moved to Cape Town she still tutored children after school at their flat.



When they got married in 1970, Sandra joined the **Roodepoort shul** where Barry was already a member. They had two children, Rene (nee Geffen) Gluckman who lives in Constantia, Cape Town, with her two children and husband Jonathan, a chess player of note. Their other daughter Lisa is a chef and lives outside Paris. She is also a physiotherapist. Sandra became very involved in the Roodepoort shul activities. She remembers, 'I was chair of the Roodepoort Zionist Association.

We organised a "hobo party" which was a fancy dress function, and we raised an enormous amount for charity; I remember all the barmitzvahs and batmitzvahs: they were always special. The progressive dinners, where different courses were served at different houses, were also fun. We also organised dinners for some of the Yomtovim including Sukkot and we catered the brochas for the barmies and batties. And there were many fetes in the Morris Hockman Talmud Torah Hall. Simchat Torah always stood out for me when there was a supper afterwards. The children had an enormous amount of fun, waving their Israeli flags and enjoying their chocolates.

Barry presided over the 70th anniversary of the Roodepoort Hebrew Congregation on 2 February 1975 (Shvat 5735). Dignitaries included Chief Rabbi B M Casper and three former members of the community Mr A Tannenbaum, Dr A Beron and Dr S Spiro. 'However, the big one was the 70th anniversary of the Roodepoort Florida Hebrew Congregation when Barry was chairman. It was a big occasion with many dignitaries attending.



Roodepoort shul

Sandra said it wasn't hard to keep kosher. 'There was a kosher butchery in Randfontein and the owner, Mike Schaffer, used to deliver our orders.' She knew Rabbi Kaye who was at the shul when

they joined. 'After he died we had another rabbi who apparently tried to steal a Torah, so he didn't last long, she laughed.

There was a Jewish nursery school in Florida, but it closed eventually. 'Even so when it was running there were more non-Jewish kids than Jewish pupils.'

The Geffens left Florida in 1988 and moved to Victory Park where Sandra taught at King David Primary School. IN 2002 they moved to Sea Point and now live at the Oasis retirement centre in Milnerton.

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Story of the Queit and Geffen Families : collected by Brian Josselowitz from Sandra (née Queit) Geffen, Johannesburg 2018

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