

A GENERATION REMEMBERS - WOODSTOCK REUNION 20 December 2004

Herschel Gelbart wrote in 2025:

Nearly 200 'old boys and girls' turned up from all over the world to attend the fantastic reunion held at the Ruth Prowse Gallery of the UCT Art Dept. This is located in Woodstock, right near where we all had lived thus a fitting location that we selected for our special reunion in December 2004.



The idea arose as many ex-Woodstockers were going to be in Cape Town from far and wide for our daughter Simone's wedding. We expected about 50 people at the reunion – but after the word got out, and it was mentioned in dispatches, in Cape Town and Johannesburg and abroad, many more wanted to be there.

Shulamith Levin wrote about the event in 2005:

There was a great sense of anticipation and excitement as nearly 200 people crowded into the Ruth Prowse Art Centre. It is a beautiful old, restored mansion in Woodstock, right in the heart of the area where the Jewish Community once lived. In earlier years it was considered by the children to be a scary "ghost house".



*The evening started with a humorous speech by **Harold Idesis** – the master of ceremonies. (right) Harold Idesis and Herschel Gelbart*



***Michael Bagraim**, lawyer and politician whose family came from Woodstock, now the Head of the SA Board of Deputies, followed, and **Joe Gatz** spoke thereafter. **Naomi Schroder** who is a professional caterer in Cape Town, catered the dinner in the true Woodstock tradition.*

Dr Wilfred Levin (left)



(With the numbers growing we realised we needed a proper committee to make sure all went well for a larger scale reunion. Those who stepped up to the plate with me were **Ada Sher (Boyd), Harold Idesis, Naomi Schroder (Boyd) and Joe Gatz**. The original fifty people turned into 150 who signed up, and then nearly 200 showed up!)

After dinner Herschel Gelbart passed around a roving microphone

*People recalled aspects of their lives. Invariably their memories involved the cheder teacher **Rev Gulis** who had had a very great impact on their lives.*



Others recalled the dense population of Jewish businesses along the main road and recalled that when the businesses were closed for high holidays the streets would be deserted.

*Among those who spoke were **Prof Solly Marks, Prof Isaac Marks, Mike Getz – Washington, Hannah Helman (Rosenthal) – Alabama, Wilf Levin –***

*Toronto, **Simon Gavish (Golshevsky) – Israel, Solly Sklar – Cape Town, and Ettie Binder – Johannesburg, who came down especially for the evening. Andrea Catzel sang.***



*All expressed their pride at having grown up in the community and appreciation for the intense Jewish education they had received. They had a sense of belonging and they reminisced about community leaders and what the shul had meant to them. As **Joe Gatz** mentioned in his speech, we will never see the likes of a community such as this again. It was self-sufficient.*



Michael Bagraim Speaking at the Reunion

Cecil Gelbart, Harold Idesis and Meyer Gelbart

It was a joyful gathering as many people who had not seen each other for many years got reacquainted





Harold Idesis and Professor Solly Marks



Solly Sklaar speaks



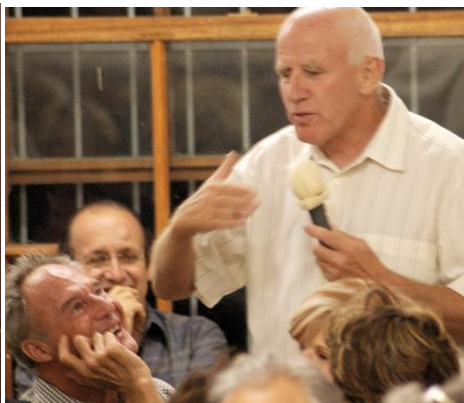
Dr Wilfred Levin



Hannah Helman née Rosenthal



Andrea Catzel entertains



Ronnie Shell speaks



Alec Katzeff



Josi Marks, Solly Marks and Mrs Marks

a boy
sings with
Carol
Levin

Woodstock, Cape Town, South Africa was a unique community. In the 1920's and 1930's many Jews who had immigrated from Latvia and Lithuania settled there. At the height of the community the membership comprised over 200 families. Meticulous records of the membership and the committee meetings are preserved for posterity by the diligent recordings of Mr Alexander Rubin. He was the shul secretary in a volunteer capacity for over a half a century.



Here we see generations of leadership families of the Woodstock community - the Marks, and Gelbart families: Josi Marks, Harold Idesis, Cecil Gelbart, Herschel Gelbart, Solly Marks, Meyer Gelbart.

Those who first settled in Woodstock were primarily businesspeople – shopkeepers. They formed a very close-knit community. Their homes and places of work were often in the same area and the shul and the cheder were the focal points of the community. This was the central theme that was alluded to in the reminiscences of the participants.

In the 1960's and 1970's the numbers dwindled as people moved out of the area, and in the 1980's the shul was sold, as a regular minyan could not be sustained. Today there are no longer any of the original Jews living in Woodstock.

Today, just as their fathers came to Woodstock to seek a better life and contributed to the development of the community and city – so too have their children moved on to new achievements in business and the professions, making their contributions to a better world.

It was evident that night at the reunion, that the bonds between the Woodstockers remain strong.
Shulamith Levin, 2005

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How did some of them progress?

Solly Marks, became a professor of medicine in gastroenterology. He was considered the 'Father of gastroenterology in South Africa', having established the Gastroenterology Clinic at Groote Schuur Hospital in 1959. He died on 19 October 2012 aged 85. **Harold Idesis** is the director of Rosebank Progress Private College in Cape Town offering quality education in a happy, caring environment, a bridge to South Africa's top universities. **Cecil Gelbart** is an Executive Consultant at ENS in the Dispute Resolution, Alternative Dispute Resolution and

Mediation practice, and is admitted as a notary public. He specialises in contractual disputes, company law, shareholder issues, international trade, and administrative law. **Meyer Gelbart** is the chief executive, of Alliance Pharmaceuticals Johannesburg. Herschel Gelbart joined his father Mike's business supplies fillings for mattresses and upholstery. **Wilfred Levin** became a radiation oncologist at Groote Schuur and in Port Elizabeth and then for 32 years at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, Toronto, **Ronnie Shell** became a Springbok Table Tennis player. **Rodney Erlich** became Professor of Public Health at UCT.

(Read more about some of them on the 'People' page – or send us your story to info@chol.website to add to the Woodstock and Salt River Hebrew Congregation pages)



Back row L-R: Ada Sher, Herschel Gelbart, Ettie Binder, Simcha Gavish (Simon Golshevsky), Issy Rosenthal, Naomi Schroeder; Front: Hannahle Helman (nee Rosenthal). Photograph provided by Herschel Gelbart.



Ettie Binder speaks



Simcha Gavish (aka Simon Golshevsky in South Africa)



Birthday cake for Herschel Gelbart (right) Harold Idesis singing Joe Gatz looking on from behind.

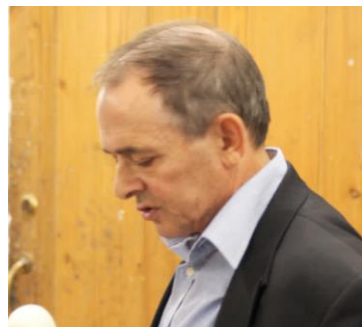




Doctor Pieress speaks



Ronnie Shell Speaks



Professor Rodney Ehrlich and Harold Idisis/ Joe Gatz speaking /

Dr Mary Solomon speaking

Pictures and texts from Herschel Gelbart and Harold Idisis, and the SAJM archives

Edited and illustrated by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London February, 2025