



CHOL – Community History On-Line

A forum for those involved in preserving the footprint of Southern African Jewish community life in digital form

Community History On-Line Newsletter # 17 March 2025

This issue: Writings from Israel compiled by Gail Loon Lustig

- 1. Letter from Israel
- 2. Eight pieces written by Gail since October 7th
- 3. Basil Porter’s personal impressions



Dear Friends


It's the time of year between Purim and Pesach, 4 weeks in all. Usually, it's a time of thinking about my brave attempts at pickling brisket, whether I will remember which corner of the cupboard I saved the jar of saltpeter the pharmacist found for me, and of course, exactly which recipe I usually use. And then there are the beautiful Judas trees with their abundant soft pink flowers that line the crescent shaped road to our building which flower every year at this time. They never disappoint in heralding the holiday around the corner and bring us untold joy and hope each Spring.

This year, it's so different. We are still at war; there are still 59 hostages being held in Gaza, mostly men, of all ages. Who knows how many of them will return alive? We are a sad and anxious nation living our days in tremendous tension and concern for what will be. The political unrest is at its peak.

I am really grateful for the lovely messages I receive from so many of you who, despite the distance, feel for what's happening here and reach out.

We are well aware of how unsettled the world is right now. Who would have thought??

In addition, and as a way of reciprocating to you all, I have attached eight short pieces I have written over the last year and a half. In addition, Basil Porter, a retired pediatrician with a rich career, who too lives in Israel, submitted an essay today which is really relevant to the situation. And then, **Harry Friedland's** story of Man's First Walk on the Moon in 1969 can be found in the Stories section together with new stories from **Russell Sacks, Richelle Shem Tov and Menucha Chana Levin**. Go to the CHOL website www.chol.website and choose 'stories'

Do take a few minutes to read them. 

I should like to remind you all that your stories are welcome! All you need to do is sit down and write and send it to me at info@chol.website This brings me to tell you that right now I together with another two CHOL members are halfway through a magical writing course done on Zoom with Sally Cranswick from Cape Town. If there are any of you interested in joining a similar course, please let me know.

Hopefully, towards the end of April, we'll be meeting on Zoom again. And yes, it will be a session of hearing from some CHOL members who have just published their memoirs.

Best wishes to all!



May we have better news really soon.



It truly is enough already!



Gail



Eight stories written since Oct, 2023 by Gail Loon-Lustig

1: 18 October 2023

Biden has just landed which means that I can't drive to visit my mother whose retirement home happens to be on the route that was probably closed to traffic this morning.

Never mind.

I went for a walk instead, first feeding the fish in our communal garden, a task of life and death, and then headed to the nearby mall.

And of course, I went to look for my favourite Bulgarian white cheese that's just salty and soft enough to add to the salad for lunch.

Sounds easier said than done. For the last while, either the cheese or the very organized and efficient lady serving there, has been missing from the cheese counter.

Now, Zehava always asks me what *more* I want, right after I tell her my first choice. I would never have done that with my patients, but who knows, maybe it would have helped, rather than being surprised by a list of endless complaints to solve.

My luck. Just one customer ahead of me. A tall, neat lady ordering cheese.

Her son came up while we were standing there asking her what else they needed. She sent him off to look for red peppers.

'Not sure you'll find them' I said. 'And if you do, they're ridiculously expensive these days.'

" I hope he does', she said. 'You know who eats them at my place?'

'Tell me', I replied.

'My dog - he loves them! Ever heard of that??'

Well, I think you and my late grandmother Celia would have had a lot to talk about'. I replied

'Her boxer dog, Henry Higgins, loved bread smeared with butter!'

Ever heard of that?

'Yummy', she said, licking her lips..

'Bye for now....'

'What else?' said Zehava - as serious as ever.

'Nothing... all ok. Hope your day goes well.'

How nice to have a different sort of story to tell today.....

2: 12 November 2023

I am angry that our Government with Netanyahu at its head, ignored the warnings years ago (all documented mind you), that Hamas was planning to destroy Israel. Not wage war and thereby gain a Palestinian State.

NO!!- Their aim, plain and simple is to eradicate Israel.

I am angry that our Army wasn't there for the citizens of the Gaza Strip when they needed them most; the early morning of 7th Oct.

I am angry that the International Red Cross has done absolutely nothing about insisting on checking out the hostages' conditions. Why not, I ask??

I am angry that for 10 months now, half the population has been demonstrating against the Judicial Reform proposed by the current extreme Right -Wing government. The reasons for this are many, but in the main as I see it, this step was condoned by Netanyahu, to save himself from the criminal charges against him. He needed the Judicial Reform to survive.

I am angry that our children all over have suffered these past two months; parents are taking anti-anxiety medication, hardly sleeping. There is no proper schooling to help them get through this time. And this from pre-school, right through.

And now for the sad bit:

I am sad when I see the names of fallen soldiers appearing on our News twice a day, 2 or more at a time. Each and every one a star in his or her own right, fearlessly destroying the evil that was about to destroy us.

I am heartbroken that neighbours of mine lost their eldest grandson two days ago. It was probably one of the most traumatic moments ever for me, knocking on their door with their son to break the news to them.

I am unconsoably sad as is everyone thinking about over two hundred hostages being kept captive in subhuman conditions without any knowledge of their current situation. Their faces stare out at us from every corner of the country. Every face a story, with the family behind the photo, not sleeping, completely devastated.

A totally inhuman reality.

And yes, according to Kubler- Ross, anger comes before bargaining and bargaining before depression and then the final stage of acceptance.

Well, true, this isn't exactly a terminal illness for us but right now, it feels like it.

All I can say is I still hope that the glimmer of light in us all, faint as it is, will steadily grow into a blinding one and that with it, we will find the reasons to continue and find meaning in this life.

May the Ten Commandments be our Godly way forward.

All of us, everywhere.

Let us pray...

3: 25 December 2023

Seriously speaking, I don't believe that before Oct 7th, I would have written about my love of carrots.

Sure, I occasionally munch on them, love carrot cake (who doesn't), as long as it is extra spicy and full of nuts, always make them the base of vegetable soups together with celery and onion. Not all that long ago, I discovered a wonderful carrot, rice, raisin, and almond recipe that someone's grandmother made only on the High Holydays. It's delicious.

Over the years, I admit to becoming fussy about which carrots I buy. They have to be fresh, firm, sweetish and crunchy. In Israel, I learnt that the ones that fit the bill best are carrots of 'Dod Moshe'. (Uncle Moses). The packet has the image of a smiling farmer wearing a hat and obviously immensely proud of his produce.

And then on Oct 7th, these carrots completely disappeared from the shelves. What remained were so much less tasty and barely edible as far as I was concerned.

Where had they disappeared to? you ask.

Here's the thing...

The massacre in Gaza by the Hamas terrorists, killed at least 1200 citizens, young and old .

One of this unbelievable number, was Sa'id Moshe, the farmer who for years had been growing potatoes, carrots and other vegetables on agricultural land in the south of the country. His knowledge, expertise and love of the land were known throughout Israel. The vegetables he grew were of the highest standard .

Sa'id believed in Peace between Palestinians and Israelis, would take supplies of his vegetables to Gaza and give them to the citizens there to enjoy.

Sa'id lived on Nir Oz, one of the kibbutzim that was brutally attacked. He was shot, in his 'safe room', early on Saturday morning, after the terrorists broke into his house where he lived with Adina his 72-year-old wife. Adina saw her husband bleed to death, but was helpless and could not save him. She was then taken on a motor-cycle with two terrorists on either side, bare-footed and without her glasses which she needed all the time and kept as a hostage in Gaza for almost two months before she was freed.

This story is traumatic and devastatingly horrific and each time I went into our fruit and veggie guy, I was reminded of it.

And then, today!

I went shopping bearing in mind that soup time is once again back. My routine is to start at the parsley, then the onions and celery and that's when I saw it!! A familiar packet! I went closer to and yes. there it was! Dod Moshe's carrots back on the shelf!

Sa'id Moshe's business has picked up again, the produce is being distributed throughout the country just like before.

I've already made some vegetable soup, read up once again about the story of the couple and read that Adina is back with her family after her captivity.

Nothing will be the same. Her home was burnt down, her husband murdered. Her heart is broken .

Time will tell what will be here. In the meantime, the end of the year is almost upon us.

It's Xmas today, a holiday that was always on the periphery of my life's experiences. And yes, the softness of the day, the joy felt by so many of my friends, is something I really do appreciate .

This is a story to honour Sa'id Moshe, the smiling guy on the carrot packet. May his memory be blessed.

Wartime is definitely not for sissies.



Dod Moshe's Carrots and Adina his Wife

4: 24 March 2024

Almost 6 months later. The date Oct 7th is one that has been mentioned at least as many times as Sep 11th -sadly for similar reasons.

I am only now really feeling and noticing how much that day has touched my very being. I feel easily distracted, constantly waiting for better news only to be disappointed, even more aware of my surroundings than before, nights of disturbing dreams and sadness.

I know that a life cycle is filled with so many different times, positive, negative, plain ordinary, but there is nothing more shocking than living through the brutal attack on innocent people, let alone abducting them, denying them their basic rights, and torturing them .

I can only hope for better days when, the tears choked up inside of me, will come gushing out as they will to so many others who live on this war-torn piece of land .

Sending love to all my friends in all languages.

5: 12 August 2024

I am tired

Of trying to work out why and what

And how much longer

It will take before we are able to sit down and sob

Our tears of salt and anguish

to the very last drop

without feeling the need to be strong.

The marathon has been run

There are winners and losers

The final ceremony is over

Time to move on

And choose the right path at last

6: 8 September 2024

At 6 this evening, just over an hour ago I felt stifled by the news and the situation here. I decided to go for a walk. Our apartment is on the 5th floor. I heard my neighbours on the sixth floor open the lift door and in a second I entered.

'You're both looking dressed for the opera, I ventured.

'Well, actually, we're off to a play. Call it what you will, escapism or the like, but we just have to get out'.

And the theatres are always packed.

'Good for you', I said. 'What I do now is read- from books to magazines and articles online in the university library. I sit on my favourite chair and it's hard to budge me'.

'I also read', said my neighbour. 'Lots'..

I went for my walk in the still too humid neighbourhood. Not far from home, I noticed 2 boxes overflowing with brand new books. Tens of them!

And of course, I gathered as many as I could to bring home and leave in the lobby since most are in Hebrew and not my choice right now.

And then I saw it!

'The Fairest Cape!'-a coffee table book with page after page of photos of my home town, the most beautiful place in the world!

So here I am, having paged through the glossy pages showing off Table Mountain, the West Coast, the Overberg...

I am sit with a huge smile on my face.

There's definitely a God...

Will soon begin the 'Kontiki Expedition' adapted for 6th graders that I picked up together with my treasure.

7: 15 July 2024

This weekend I really made an effort to read the Friday newspaper delivered to our door. Coffee at my side, as well as my most comfortable chair, were in full support. It really shouldn't be such an ordeal after so many years, but truthfully, reading a serious paper in Hebrew, is still a challenge.

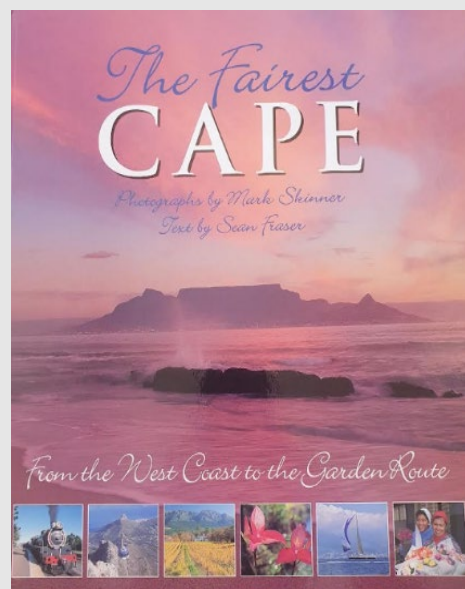
Found myself enjoying some very well written articles on a multitude of topics. The ones that impressed me were about the state of our apocalyptic world (was even tempted to eat some chocolate then -'what the Hell?', I thought.)

And then, the article about young immigrants to the country from Russia, optimistic and pleasant and even one on how many Israelis are returning to the country despite all! (Who would believe this?!)

And then I came upon one which seemed a little strange, but intrigued me nevertheless. A secular man getting on in life who was tempted to learn about Judaism from an Ultra-Orthodox observer who knocked on his door, requested no payment or other favours, but to sit with him once a week and learn about what it means to be a Jew .

Huh, admit very weird.

How come? Was he looking for someone to convert to religion? OK, he even convinced his new student to put a mezuzah on his door and to pay a visit to his family on Purim who lived quite a distance away, and see how his 10 kids all dressed up, celebrated the festival. Despite the ultra-poor conditions, our friend felt the warmth and friendliness of his teacher and family.



And so the article continues rather naively. Something missing. And then, after a few pages, he addresses the question I'd been wondering about from the beginning. How exactly did he come to choose his pupil who lives on the north side of the city?

Here it comes ...

Now! Our religious teacher has a passion for water! Swimming in the sea, in springs, pools, wherever and whenever he can, he'll put on his bathing trunks and swim for as long as he can.

Just imagine - It would seem really strange and unacceptable to go to Tel Aviv once a week by bus and rides with kind souls to swim for a few hours. After all, how could he explain this to his wife?? However, if it were for teaching purposes, sharing the joys of the Jewish religion with an ignoramus, then surely, he deserved the swim? And so, he knocked on doors of apartments near the beach until he found the writer of this article! Our student, lived right there, opposite the warm Mediterranean Sea cordoned off for the religious, men and women separately. It was the perfect solution. An almost win-win arrangement and one that posed no threats to the other !

After this treat, I immediately thought of my grandmother Yetta, whose roots were the same as our teacher and how the only time I really saw her happy was when she swam in the Indian Ocean off Cape Town in her black swimsuit. She would splash in the waves wet her face, speak in Yiddish how wonderful it felt, say a prayer or two and come out after what seemed like ages !

It is true that several of Yetta's daughters and grandchildren inherited this love of water from her which must have given her a great sense of satisfaction .

And so there we have it - another Saturday almost over.

8: 3 March 2025

This morning on my way to buy some sesame rolls, I popped into the fish-shop. The crumbed hake fillets from South Africa were definitely a success a few weeks ago and made me think of how I simply adored the fish dishes we had at home all those years back. From Janet's fishcakes, Granny Yetta's pickled fish, to Granny Celia's sole 'fingers' in crumbs, twisted and the best treat after school at her house.

'Hmm, I 've come to buy some more crumbed hake ', I told the owner who seemed to be pretty available and friendly this morning.

'OK here they are, he said'', taking my money at the same time.

'Now that I'm here, I thought I'd tell you that the last batch of frozen hake from South Africa I bought here a few weeks ago wasn't good. Only after I opened the packet, I noticed that the expiry date was for a few days' time. The fish didn't look good at all. I did bring it over to show you, but the shop was so full I gave up before I even told you and threw it away'.

"Well, listen, money shouldn't be everything in today's world as it surely has become, said Haim'....

'Yup, and as they say, you can't take it with you, right?? After all is said and done'.

'Exactly! Look at my wife's good friend, who went and died while driving in Ramat Gan a few days ago! Such a shock!'

And of course we went into the details of how that happened, whether it was simply a broken heart or another possible cause. This always happens to me when people tell me medical stories- oh well.

So I'm writing to tell you that I went home with two packets of fish- Now all I have to do is think about whose recipe to use for the frozen hake.

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## **The Road Back by Basil Porter**

After more than five hundred days in captivity, hostages have returned. In most cases, their health and nutrition have been severely compromised. And some have returned in boxes. It is sobering to remember that moment on October 7th, when we were shown a picture of Shiri, the mother of the Bibas family, holding two red-headed children in her arms, her face saying it all. *Help, please. Before we are taken away!* The picture that every Israeli holds in his memory since October 7th. The babies, Ariel and Kfir, two years and eight months old. They will be a precious bargaining tool we thought; nobody would deliberately harm them. That picture, circulated by Hamas, reminded me of two other heart-rending pictures of children as helpless victims of war. The Jewish child in the ghetto raising his arms to the German captors, and the naked Vietnamese girl fleeing the flames from American attacks, her body covered in burns, the soldiers strolling behind.

Can any of us really understand what Yarden Bibas has been through, kidnapped while trying to defend his family, then five hundred days in captivity not knowing their fate, and coming home to the ghastly reality? The coffins of the Bibas family travelled across the country to a memorial service at their home on Kibbutz Nir Oz, the roads lined by people shedding tears, knowing that these three hostages were now part of the more than one

hundred members of the kibbutz in a war where more than two thousand civilians were murdered.

We must all remember these pictures and remind ourselves that however much adult soldiers kill each other for no good reason, innocent women and children should not be there. The thousands of children who died in Gaza were not “collateral damage”, nor were the Bibas children; all were children not yet matured to fight, or to understand why big people fight and kill.

How does an eighty-two-year-old couple deal with “the situation”? Here in central Tel Aviv, one way is for my wife and I to stroll to the *Hostage Square* as it is now officially known. The long table, the endless yellow chairs and the artificial tunnel which allows people to feel something of the claustrophobia the hostages are experiencing. The families and dedicated citizens patiently sit holding placards with pictures of the hostages, ready to chat with the people visiting this center for action regarding the hostages’ fate.

Last Friday morning was different. We strolled in an unpleasant *Hamsin* heat to the tent camp near the Defense Ministry. A few dozen tents, and relatively few people sitting with placards, setting tables with drinks and snacks. The atmosphere was more like a *Shiva* visit, sitting and trying to identify with the nightmarish existence of the hostages still in Gaza and the angst of their families. We didn’t stay long, the silence was painful, the tents somehow symbolizing the upheaval of the families, a feeling of total despair.

Life in Israel has its vibrant side of culture and restaurants, which has managed to somehow survive the past eighteen-month nightmare of war. It’s tricky to find a table in restaurants in Tel Aviv; the Israel Philharmonic somehow continues its complex schedule of concerts despite ongoing cancellations of invited musicians, theater productions carry on. But the dominant national emotion is mourning, for all those killed in the War. The memorial sites at the site of the Nova concert massacre on October 7<sup>th</sup> will attract thousands who want to touch the placards with pictures and stories of their loved ones. A noticeable absence will be of government members and ministers, scared of showing their cowardly faces.

People are angry. Angry at the *Kahanists* who lead the battle for ongoing war, the ultra-orthodox who demonstrate their national pride by refusing to serve in the IDF, angry at the Opposition who still seem unable to put forward a real threat to the Bibi cult, and above all, angry at the man who despite being the leader responsible for this war, keeps the kettle boiling by demanding more of it, refusing to talk about the hostages or with their loved ones. He listens to no one and has neutralized Biden and anyone else who dares to stand in his way, with the new boy Trump just starting to reveal himself as his partner for establishing a new Middle East.

We huddle together, reassuring one other that despite everything, Israel is the only place for Jews to feel secure. And yes, antisemitism has reared its ugly head in this war, not in the slums of Islam, but also on Ivy League campuses. It has stirred our government into action, allowing our erudite Minister for Diaspora Affairs to organize a conference devoted to antisemitism. Most of the invitees are representatives of the most right-wing governments in the world today (and there are many with serious past records of antisemitism), and many others have declined the invite. I guess one never really knows who your true friends are. I look at the young soldier girl with her machine gun at the entrance of the Ministry of Defense, and wonder what she's thinking, or whether the system has succeeded in convincing her too that "only Bibi can".

Most of us belong to the 'Silent Generation,' those born during, or following World War two, a generation which only wanted peace and quiet. Many of our parents had experienced pogroms and two world wars, which might explain their desire for "Do Not Disturb," but many of us had found a way to actively escape life under apartheid, with the Zionist youth movement capturing us and persuading us that Aliyah was the way to go. We now review the wreckage after a totally unexpected and brutal war, wondering about the future of the country, the Jews and the world. Liberal doctrine is becoming passe as the world is taken over by authoritarian regimes, and the word "Aliyah" seems like total *chutzpah* for anyone who does not share a messianic or fanatical national view of Zionism.

But just as we begin to declare that the "Start -Up Nation" is dead, a 32-billion-dollar exit was closed by a company run by four young Israelis. This is not exactly one of the socialist ideals we were taught in the Movement, but it is a source of pride at this time, when everything seems to be dissolving into dust and distant memory.

True, residents are returning to their homes in the north since the rocket barrages abated, and survivors of the war in the south are slowly planning a future in their ravaged settlements. All we really need now is to replace the Prime Minister and his government, with one which will deal with the diversity and craziness that is Israel and allow our generation to talk once again with pride about the country that we all love and believe in.

Checkout the CHOL website: [www.chol.website](http://www.chol.website) which now has on it:

- 57 communities <https://chol.website/communities.htm>
- 61 Memoirs <https://chol.website/memoirs.htm>
- 159 original stories <https://chol.website/stories.htm>
- 40 Videos of presentations <https://chol.website/presentations.htm>

also on the site are resources and journal articles and all our CHOL newsletters

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CHOL – Community History On-Line is a forum set up in 2020, under the auspices of the Kaplan Centre at UCT and the South African Jewish Museum – bringing together all those working on / or interested in creating an online presence relating to the **History of Jewish Communities in Southern Africa**. see www.chol.website contact info@chol.website.

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