

Cape Town Nostalgia by Ivor Kosowitz

Cape Town, next to Perth, was for many years, the world's best kept secret. Today, it is internationally known as one of the top 10 cities in the world to visit.

The city is situated in the "city bowl". This means that it is surrounded by mountains. Devil's Peak on the left, the majestic Table Mountain in the centre, then Lions' Head on the right which drops down to Signal Hill. Signal Hill was so named as for about 300 years up till today, the noon day gun is fired. Signal Hill was, in my time, the place where lovers used to go at night, to watch the city lights of course!

In summer, a cloud covers Table Mountain. This is called "The Table Cloth". Like the Fremantle Doctor, a strong wind accompanies this cloud. This Southeaster is known as the 'Cape Doctor'.

Most visitors ascend to the top of the mountain via a revolving cable car. It is so popular that any visitor must be prepared for a long wait to go up. The view from the top is spectacular. There is an animal called the "dassie" that lives on the mountain. It is about the same size as our quagga.

On the Atlantic Ocean side, there are many beaches such as Bantry Bay, Graaf's Pool (men only), Milton Pool (for kids), the Pavilion (a commercial swimming pool facility), Rocklands, Saunders Rocks, Clifton's four beaches, Camps Bay, Sandy Bay (nudist), Hout Bay etc. The scenic drive around the Cape Peninsula is one of the best ocean drives in the world, even better than the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, and I have travelled on both.

Depending on one's age, you went to most of these beaches. In my day, Saunders Rocks and Clifton was the 'in place' to be if you were a Jewish teenager, or in your early twenties. Only problem I had was that the water was so cold, coming up from the frigid Antarctic, that I could never swim in it. So that is why Muizenberg on the Indian Ocean was so popular.

Then of course, in summer in the evening especially Saturday and Sunday nights, you went for a walk on the Sea Point beach front. A very large number of these strollers were Jewish of course, and you always bumped into many familiar faces along the way. If you wanted a special Italian "water" ice cream, you stopped at the "Venetia". They also were famous for the most mouth-watering fish dishes including sole. Of course, there were many fine cafés and restaurants along the promenade. Nearby, we had the "Blue Train" and mini-golf (Putt Putt) for the kids and the young at heart.

The "main" restaurant in the city was the 'Waldorf'. They always had a band and a comedian. The "main" cinema (called bioscope) and theatre, was the 'Alhambra'. It was built to resemble sitting in an outdoor space surrounded by trees. Small lights in the ceiling were switched on and off, to resemble twinkling stars.

On a Saturday afternoon, many kids went to the Alhambra. We went early with our comic books and “thrillers” to swap. Then the movies started. First a South African newsreel, then an English newsreel (Movietone News) then a cartoon. This was usually followed by an English “short”, and then a serial. All this before interval. As today, you had popcorn, or ice cream, or even an “Eskimo Pie”. Only then, the feature movie or “flick” started.

We never grew up with TV as it only arrived in 1976, just after I left for good. So everyone listened to the radio. Springbok radio was the favourite. We listened to radio serials such as Superman, Captain Silver and the Seahound, Inspector Carr, and Mark Saxon and Gromyko in 'No Place to Hide'. Later we had 'Snoek Town Calling', the 'Loudspeaker Show, Radio Jukebox, Caltex Kaskenades' and even an Australian show – Life with Dextor (Dutton). Few will not forget 'Pick-a-box' with another Ozzie, Clark (Clakey) McKay). The 'Quiz Kids' was popular on Friday nights.

The main cricket commentator was Charles Fortune. Bill Prince, Eric Egan, Hugh Rouse, Pip Freedman, Leslie Green, Henry Howell, Adrian Steed, Johnnie Walker, Paddy O’Byrne, Peter Chiswell, Peter Lotis, Don Davis, Douggie Laws, Andre Brink, Mervyn John, Percy Sieff, Gordon Van Rooyen, Bob Courtney and Esme Euvrad were popular radio announcers and newsreaders. Other popular programs included “Tea with Mr. Green”, “Lopis Pets Parade”, “Mr Walker wants to Play”, “Test the Team” and “So Maak Mens”. Bea Reed presented on the English Radio Station.

Every Pesach and Rosh Hashanah, on English Radio, a one-hour broadcast was aired from the Garden Shul. Even today, I still have some of these broadcasts on tape, probably the only tapes of these airings anywhere in the world!

In later years FM Radio was introduced, and Cape Town had Radio Cape of Good Hope.

If you did not like the SA stations, you tuned into LM radio from Lorenzo Marques, on the East Coast of Africa.

In summer, on Sunday nights, I often went to the Cape Town City Hall to hear the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra. The cost of a ticket was only 50c for a wonderful evening of light classical music.

In winter, soccer was very popular. So, on many Sunday afternoons, we would go to watch popular local international teams such as Hellenic playing Israel. Then on the way home, we would stop to get bagels, *bulkas* or *tagelach* from 'Millies', 'Riesies' or Mrs Marcus.

Jewish events such as Yom Ha’atzmaut, special emergency meetings during the Wars and Habonim Play Evenings, were held in the huge Weizman Hall in Sea Point.

In the 1950's I remember going on holiday to places like Montague, Ceres, Franschhoek, Hermanus and Onrus. Onrus became the home for the Habonim Summer camps which at its peak had about 1200 kids from all over SA for about a three week period.

A special event, held over Xmas, was the Cape Town Coon Carnival. Competing bands of the Cape Coloured and Cape Malay communities would march through the city to compete for a Cup. They were extremely colourful and played unique Cape Town music. One famous song was "Daar kom die Alibama". This was about an American trading ship coming to visit Cape Town.

Occasionally Israeli naval ships came to visit. The "Misgav" was the first destroyer to visit the Cape. As Jews we were so proud, and we went down to the "Docks" to take "our" Israeli sailors out to see our city.

My parents were "Verbrente Zionists". From 1958 to 1972, I belonged to Habonim, as a *Chanich* then onto a *Madrich*. My brother, Mike, made Aliya in 1965. He settled on Kibbutz Tzora, and is still there today.

During my time with Habonim, I was a member of the "famous" *Gedud* Tel-Yosef. In 1966 we even won a National Hitcharut (Jamborree) in Bloemfontein, and almost missed the train back home as the final ceremony took too long!

Many of us went to UCT (University of Cape Town). If you were not affiliated to a Jewish Youth Movement, you probably joined AJUS. If you were "thirsty", you popped in to the "Pig and Whistle" for a pint – Castle or Lion Lager.

An annual highlight was the UCT Rag, when the CBD was overtaken by students collecting for Shawco, a charity for coloureds and blacks. We built floats which wound their way through the main streets, similar to the Xmas Pageant in Perth.

In the early 1970's, the Nico Malan Opera House opened. Now Cape Town had a world class theatrical venue.

We are fortunate that in Perth today, there are a number of people who were involved in some of the above organisations and institutions.

So for me, I really never left Cape Town, just transposed it. Our kids too are lucky to have this "Golden Age". Instead of living a life in Poland, London and Miami, they live in South Africa, London and Miami, or in Perth!

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