

# Beryl Kretzmar

Compiled by her daughter, **Geraldine Auerbach MBE**, as a story for her ten great-grandchildren whom she never knew ranging in age from 14 to 4 at the time of writing, 21

November 2020 - what would have been Beryl's 111<sup>th</sup> birthday.



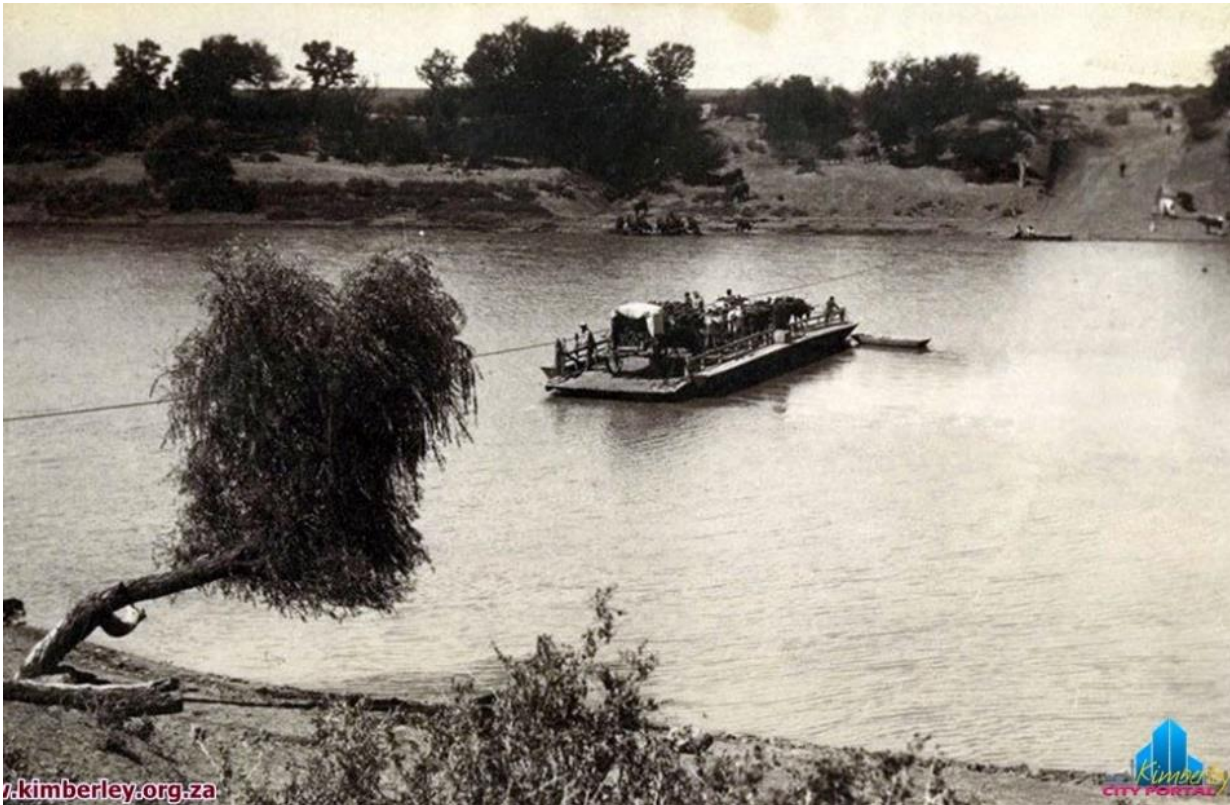
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## Chapter 1. Schmidtsdrift:

**Beryl Kretzmar's Parents were Jacob and Amalie Bergman** (née Friedlander). See: [Bergman, Jacob and Amalie \(nee Friedlander\)](#) When Beryl was born, on 21 November 1909, they were living in a little settlement near Kimberley called **Schmidtsdrift**. This was on a main crossing of one of the major South African rivers, the Vaal River.

There were no bridges over the river then, so people, horses and carts, animals and eventually motor cars were pulled across the river on a floating platform secured by chains, called a **pont**.



### **Beryl's father, Jacob Bergman**

Jacob Bergman operated the **pont** with his brother David. They also ran a little **hotel** there, and had a **General Dealers Shop** selling everything that the farmers in the area and their families might need: tea, coffee and sugar, flour to make bread, pots and pans, brooms and brushes, saddles for their horses and oats for their donkeys, material and sewing equipment for the farmers wives as well as mirrors and even jewellery.

The brothers were very happy that they could make a good living in Schmidtsdrift, in safety and freedom helping the farmers around them – and also managing to send some money back home to help support the family left behind in Kandau, in Courland, Latvia.

The Bergman boys had come to South Africa, as teenagers, to escape harsh conditions in Latvia, one of the Baltic States in Eastern Europe. There Jews were forced to live, crowded together in small villages (shtetls) under severe restrictions of what they were allowed to do, and oppression from the Tsar of Russia. This made it difficult for them to earn a living. Often young Jewish men were forcibly recruited into the Russian army for several years. Therefore, many of them took the opportunity, when the Tsar said they could leave, to try to find better opportunities for themselves and their families elsewhere.

It took great courage for these young people to say goodbye to their families and take the long and uncomfortable journey to a faraway land where they did not speak the language. But remarkably and fortunately huge numbers of young Jewish men made the trip between 1880 and 1925 (2 or three million) to try to find a better life for themselves and their families. Many left their wives and young children behind until they could earn enough money to bring them over.

Most went to America, many to England and other parts of the British Empire. About 40.000 went to South Africa, where the possibilities seemed great, especially as diamonds and gold had recently been discovered there.

This was part of one of the greatest and most important voluntary migrations of peoples in the history of the world. These immigrants and their children and grandchildren with hard work and access to excellent free education, were able to make significant contributions to all aspects of life in science, medicine, business and the arts, in all the places where they settled.

## **The Journey from Latvia**

When they left, Jacob was about 17, and his younger brother David just 15. They first made their way overland by train or cart from their village of Kandau, to the Baltic port of Libau. From there they went by cargo boat to England, where they stayed over at 'The Jews Temporary Shelter' in London while waiting for their passage on another cargo boat to South Africa.

The Bergman boys were lucky because their father, Osser Yitzhak Bergman had accompanied them to South Africa to help them to settle in a suitable occupation. Each family knew somebody already there who might help them get a start in some sort of business, selling things that people needed.

The Bergmans had some acquaintances who had gone further north to what was then called Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). So, they went there first for a couple of years, but we don't know what happened to them there. Eventually they came back to South Africa and found their niche in Schmidtsdrift where they could make a living. Schmidtsdrift had the added advantage of the possibility of finding diamonds on the banks of the river. This was to prove important for their future.

Once the boys were settled, father Yitzhak left them and went back to Latvia. (The sad story of what happened to the family members who did not emigrate – during WWI (1914-1918) and the annihilation in 1941 of the entire Jewish community when Germany overran the Baltic states, is another story - you can read it here [Bergman, Jacob and Amalie \(nee Friedlander\)](#)). So, now we know about her father Jacob Bergman's origins – but what about Beryl's mother?

## **Going home to find a wife**

There were no Jewish girls in Schmidtsdrift – in fact only a few in South Africa. As we have seen, it was the young men who ventured forth in the first place. When they had settled in a place and found a business activity from which they could support a family, those that already had a wife and family, sent money for a boat ticket for them to come and join them

Those back home eagerly awaited hearing good news that their man had prospered. Everyone in the village then helped the young wife and her family pack up and prepare for the long and



arduous journey. (Imagine your own mother having to travel across land and sea with lots of luggage including candlestick and sacred books, with several small children that could easily fall ill or get lost on the way). Reunions were often difficult with women having to adapt to different circumstances and to sometimes completely changed husbands (after four or five years of separation). But they were glad to do it.

(I don't know the family in the picture above, but this is what it must have been like to arrive off the boat and re-unite at the docks).

### **Beryl's Mother, Amalie Friedlander**

For those young men who did not already have a wife, like Jacob – it was time to go back home to find one! The Jewish girls in the villages also hoped that someone who had established themselves in a new country would come back and choose them for this exciting adventure. There were plenty of girls lined up to pick from when they made that trip to find a wife.

Jacob chose Amalie Friedlander from the Port of Libau in Latvia. She was known to his family and was well educated at the best schools. She had learned to play the piano very well. She could have been a concert pianist, but she was pleased to leave the difficult conditions in Latvia and be carried away to the tip of Africa to start a new life.

David Bergman chose Dika Levin from Sweden and they all settled down together and the Bergman Brothers, worked hard in the hotel and shop.

Jacob and Amalia were married in Konigsberg in January 1903. Jacob was aged 30, and Amalie was 27.

### **Amalie settles down in Schmidtsdrift**

He brought her from a cosmopolitan European city to the veld in Schmidtsdrift! But she was very happy. Jacob bought her a piano and, in the evenings, she played on it while the visitors to the bar crowded round and sang songs for hours. In the daytime the sun shone, and Amalie had lots of help to run the hotel. Jacob had helpers in his shop and could even support other immigrant Jews from his hometown by lending them goods and a donkey cart to go out to the neighbouring farms to sell. It was a happy time.

Soon Jacob and Amalie had a daughter. They called her **Hilda (1905)** Their next child was **Beryl (1909)**, who became our mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother.



**Beryl Bergman, born on 21 November 1909**



Above we can see a cheeky smile on her baby face.

Beryl would have two younger sisters as well, **Hannah** (1913) and **Eileen** (1917).

David and Dika had a daughter **Kate** nearly the same age as Beryl and also a much younger daughter **Siri**.

### **The sisters and cousins all had a happy childhood in Schmidtsdrift**

They did not go to primary school. Instead, they had a governess. This is a personal teacher whom the family brought out from Europe to teach them. They loved her. Apart from teaching them to count and add and read and write, she took them on long walks on the riverbank. They collected pretty stones and bits of wood which they arranged in pretty patterns. They learned about all the wildflowers and bushes that grew in the area. They fed the chickens and collected the eggs and loved playing out in the fresh air. When the time came, Hilda, who was the oldest, went to boarding school in Kimberley.

David Bergman sadly died in the 1918 flu pandemic. He was just 44 years old. Dika took Kate and Siri with her back to live in Sweden with her family.



Above is a lovely picture I found of the Jacob Bergman family in Kimberley in about 1920. Left to right at the back, Jacob, Eileen (about 3) and Hilda (about 15) Seated Hannah (about 7) Amalie, and Beryl (about 11).

## Chapter 2: Kimberley

As the family grew up, the Bergmans set up managers to look after their businesses in Schmidtsdrift, or sold them, and the family relocated to Kimberley in 1920. Jacob was already becoming an experienced dealer in alluvial diamonds (ones that can be picked up near the surface on the ground and did not need to be mined). He opened his diamond office and also set up a wholesale business called Whiteman and Co in Kimberley serving the country stores and farm shops all over the Northern Cape.



This is a picture of the house that Beryl grew up in in Kimberley at 22 Milner Street, on the corner of Synagogue Street. My daughter Loren Auerbach is standing outside on a visit to Kimberley from London in 1998

## Overseas trips

The Bergman's did well and were able to go on overseas trips to visit their family still in Latvia as well as their diamond business partners in Berlin and Antwerp.

In this picture, Beryl (seated) is holding a baby lion with Hannah standing next to her at the Berlin Zoo, on a trip they made in 1928.

Once in Kimberley, Beryl and her sisters went to Girls High School. After school, Beryl did not go to University as her younger sisters were to do. She went to work with her father, Jacob Bergman, 'Pappie' as they called him, in his diamond office. They were specially involved with alluvial diamonds, of which many deposits were found, and claims pegged around Kimberley – and Schmitsdrift.

**Noel, Kretzmar**, a new young doctor who had arrived in Kimberley early 1926 (when Beryl was about 15) was often invited to Shabbos dinner at the Bergmans. From the moment he had met her, he had been captivated by her charm and poise and her long dark hair. But he had many pressing things to do, looking after his own mother and siblings and establishing his medical practice, while she grew up. She grew into a beautiful woman and they eventually got engaged and married in 1935.







Beryl did not go to University after school, as her two younger sisters were later to do at Cape Town. She worked with her father in his diamond office in Kimberley.



### Chapter 3: The Bergman girls get married

All the Bergman girls got married and lived with their husbands and families in Kimberley for all, or most of their lives.

**Hilda** married **Nate Hendler** in about 1928. Nate worked with Jacob in alluvial diamonds and in a sholesale business in Kimberley called Whiteman and Co. Their children: Owen (c1929) Lola (c1932) and Herbert (1936)

**Beryl** married the new doctor who came to practice in Kimberley, **Noel Kretzmar** from Malmesbury Cape, in February 1935. Their children: Theodore (1936) and Geraldine (1940).

**Hannah** married advocate **Jack Frank** from Kimberley in December 1939. just after WW II had started. Their children Alma (1942) and Brenda (1946)

**Eileen** married **Archie Sandler** who was a teacher from Vryheid. He also worked with Nate. Their children were Jonty (1951) and Ella (1955)

The four sisters and their cousin Kate who had returned to South Africa from Sweden and married Joe Friedman of Kimberley [Friedman, Joe & Kate \(nee Bergman\) & son David](#) were very close friends even when they grew up. Beryl and Hannah spoke every day on the telephone. They went to town together to do their shopping. At first, only Beryl had a motor car, so she took her sisters shopping.



Here is a picture of most of the family in about October 1937. Seated are Jacob with Beryl's son Theodore (Kretzmar) on his lap and Amalie with Hilda's younger son Herbert (Hendler) on her lap. Behind are three of the daughters, from the left, Hannah, Beryl and Hilda. Hilda's oldest son Owen is on the left and daughter Lola on the right. Youngest sister Eileen was probably away at University.

## Jacob and Amalie pass away in Kimberley

Amalie died, aged 65, on 11 December 1941 from a carcinoma on her leg. I don't remember her at all, (I was born in January 1940) but I do remember, standing on a box next to her bed when I was nearly two, in the porch of 22 Milner Street. Her bed was covered with a white counterpane. I think Hannah had this afterwards. Thereafter, Jacob lived with Hilda at 7 Lodge Road (a house originally built for, and lived in, by Sir Ernest Oppenheimer). Jacob died on 8 February 1947 at our house in Carrington Road, aged 74.

Jacob and Amalie are both buried in the West End Cemetery in Kimberley. Their four daughters used to visit their graves together every Sunday morning. I often accompanied them. Beryl, with the motor car would collect them. After arranging our flowers on the graves, we would all have tea at Auntie Hilda's house.

In the picture below, my daughter Loren is standing between the two graves during our visit to Kimberley in 1998. Sadly, there was no family left in Kimberley to put flowers anymore! Loren was always interested in the family heritage and history.

Now I am collecting it for her, and sharing our family story with you, the members of the family, and extended family who may be interested in years to come. Loren, who looked a lot like beryl, sadly died of cancer in December 2011. You can read the full story of Jacob and Amalie – and what happened to the family that did not emigrate here [Bergman, Jacob and Amalie \(nee Friedlander\)](#)





## Chapter 4: Beryl's Married life in Kimberley



**Beryl and Noel Kretzmar got married in the Kimberley synagogue 17 February 1935.**

Retinue: Standing at the back from the left are Noel's youngest sister **Ashne**, his youngest brother **Julius**, Beryl's youngest sister **Eileen**, **Noel and Beryl**, Noel's brother **Arnold** and Beryl's sister **Hannah**. Seated are **Nappy Frank** (Noel's sister **Freda**'s husband) with the bride's mother **Amalie Bergman**, then **Freda Frank** seated next to the bride's father **Jacob Bergman**.



They went to Durban on Honeymoon which they greatly enjoyed.



Soon They were blessed with a **son Theodore** born in October 1936



Three years later, I, their **daughter Geraldine**, arrived in January 1940



## Holidays in Muizenberg



To escape the scorching weather in Kimberley in summer they went on holiday often to Muizenberg where there was a fresh breeze every day. This picture is taken in December 1940 in a

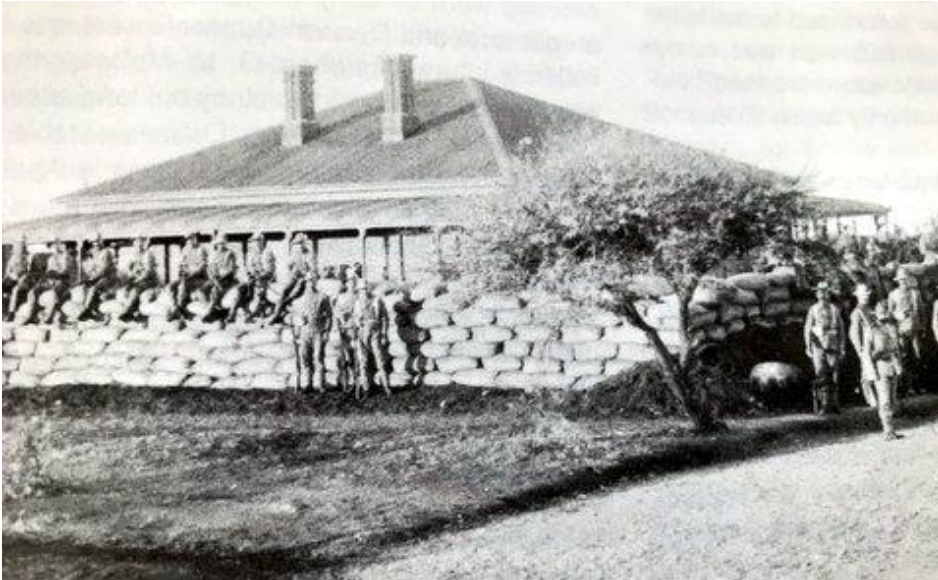
photographer's cabin on the beach front with these stuffed lions.

## Our house in Kimberley, KUMO



This is the house we lived in, in Carrington Road from 1945. It was called Kumo, as it was built for a Danish person and it's a Danish place name.





The house had been commandeered and turned into a fort during the **Siege of Kimberley** (1899-1900). (in the Anglo Boer War of 1899-1902.

The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment built the fortified positions we can see, left and they were positioned there for a short time before being

replaced by the Kimberley Regiment.

There is an **ammunition bunker** in the back garden. We called it the 'air-raid shelter' and used it as a storeroom. There was also a full-sized tennis court with wire netting round it. To the right of the picture of the bunker below, you can see the domed 'summerhouse' used for tea when we had tennis parties (not very often). There were other storage rooms in the back yard, as well as a foul 'hok' where we kept chickens from time to time. There were servants' rooms and we built on a laundry room and a servants' shower room, as well as a new double garage.

In the old garage Noel kept **planks of prime stinkwood** that he had bought in Knysna and railed up to Kimberley. He then found a wonderful craftsman carpenter to make him desks, a dining room suite, bookshelves and anything else he could think of, (even though it would not have been Beryl's first choice of furniture style). I can well recall the smell of the oil used to polish the stinkwood furniture in every room.



When our family bought Kumo, there were two towering **jacaranda trees** in the front garden, and it had a kei-apple hedge around the perimeter. Beryl soon redesigned the garden with a curving path to a new front gate, (which you can see in the first picture), a lovely orange brick front wall and a beautiful rockery and fishpond. (which you can't see). And a driveway from the street, all the way round to the back door

Despite its spaciousness and exciting history (it is now a

National Monument) it was a challenging house to live in, with long passages and a layout not conducive to family living.





Beryl had cherished a plan to build a family two-story house on a plot they owned further down Carrington Road (eventually sold to Natie and Fay Cohen) but nevertheless, she put her stamp on the décor and furnishings and made a happy home.



My children loved to explore the corridors, grounds and outbuildings. (we were never allowed to ride out trike inside! Below we see the side lawn, the driveway on the left and one of the huge jacarandas with grandchildren in the paddling pool





Noel and Beryl built the first swimming pool in a house in Kimberley – it was like a square dam, but it certainly kept us cool.

Here Beryl is with Geraldine and youngest sister Eileen and her son Jonty Sandler in 1953.



This is what the **Big Hole** – the **Kimberley Mine**, looked like when I was a child, in the 1950s with water far down below the surface. And the Kimberley skyline rather flat at the top. (today the water has risen to quite near the top and the skyline has taller buildings. This is what it looks like now in 2020



Beryl had all her sisters and many friends in Kimberley. She was the President of the Union of Jewish Women on several occasions and over for many years. She wrote the history of the Kimberley branch of the Union of Jewish Women that you can read here. [UJW History of the Kimberley Branch](#). She played a part in the civic life of Kimberley on various committees. She played golf and latterly bridge.



## Chapter 5: The Children Leave Home ....

As soon as Theo (1953) and I (Geraldine) (1956) had finished school, we left Kimberley aged 17 to go to University in Johannesburg. We both graduated in 1960. and like most Kimberley children, never went back to settle in Kimberley.

Here we are on holiday again perhaps, in 1957 or 58 when Theo and I had perhaps already gone to University.



### Geraldine graduated with a BA in 1960

Geraldine's BA specialised in Fine Art and History of Art and Psychology was followed by a Secondary Teachers' Certificate at the University of Cape Town. I taught standard 4c for a year at Barnato Park in Johannesburg. Theo and Ronnie also graduated MB BCh from Wits in 1960.



Here are our graduation pictures  
Theodore and Geraldine together  
Then Ronnie above.



## Children get married

I married Ronnie Auerbach in February 1962. He was also a Wits medical graduate in 1960, and we went to London on honeymoon and have been there ever since, Ronnie specialising in ENT.



Here we are on the steps in front of the Kimberley synagogue at our wedding on 4 February 1962. Front row: Theo, Beryl and Noel, Geraldine and Ronnie, Ronnie's mother, Bobbie Friedman and Ronnie's uncle Sidney Berg. The girl behind between us is Ronnie's sister Bertha Friedman and the other girl my maid of honour, Anita Klein. Behind Bobbie is best Man classmate Gerald Shulman. I can't remember who the poleholders were.

## Theo Became a Doctor in 1960 and married Gwenda Cohen in 1965

Theo qualified as a Doctor in 1960 and married Gwenda Cohen, daughter of Selma and Teddy Cohen (formerly of Kimberley) of Bloemfontein in Bloemfontein in January 1965. They travelled to Edinburgh and London with baby Warren in 1966 for Theo to specialise in. general surgery.



We were able to spend some wonderful time together, with Warren (right below) and our children Loren and Anthony, when they lived in a flat on Heath View N2 a few steps down the road from the our house. After they returned to South Africa, Theo practiced Surgery in Springs where they raised their three sons before moving to Johannesburg.



### Honours for Theo

After developing MS in his 50s, Theo changed career to work in Health Insurance at Discovery Health where in 2020 he is still working. At the age of 84, he was given a **lifetime achievement award** for his services to the company (see picture below).





## Honours for Geraldine



I taught art in Harrow for 26 years and along the way founded and directed first the Bnai Brith Jewish Music Festival in 1984 – and following from that every two years until 2000 when we became the Jewish Music Institute and were invited to be based at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

For all this, I was honoured by Bnai Brith in 1987, made an MBE by the Queen in 2000 (seen below at Buckingham Palace) – and in 2008 I was made an hon Fellow of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (along with Michael Palin of Monty Python and travel documentary fame).

**Noel and Beryl would surely be pleased and proud of their son and daughter.....**

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## Visits to London Springs and Kimberley

Beryl and Noel visited their children as often as they could in Springs and London and we all visited them in Kimberley. Below is a rare occasion when the whole family was together in Springs in about 1976 or 77





Back row Geraldine and Ronnie Auerbach with Loren then Gwenda and baby Seton and Theo  
Front row Karen Auerbach (known then as Jo-Jo) Anthony Auerbach Noel and Beryl Kretzmar and Warren and Justin Kretzmar. Below are Noel and Beryl in the 1980s



## Chapter 6: Beryl and Noel move to Lyndale Flats

In the very early 1980s, Beryl realised that the house was now much too big for them so they sold up and settled on the fourth floor at Lyndale Flats where they were very comfortable and happy. Beryl's sister Hannah and husband Jack, lived in the flat directly above them.



Gradually her sisters and friends began to leave Kimberley. Her younger sister Eileen left first for Johannesburg. Then Hilda went to Johannesburg with her son Herbert. Favourite sister Hannah passed away from bowel cancer in Kimberley in 1985. Then Eileen was ill and in 1988 when she was recovering her car was hit by a truck and she was killed. These were big blows for Beryl.



In July 1989, she had a heart attack and sadly died from a clot on her lung. She was 79 years old. It was just before Noel's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday and a few weeks before Seton's Barmitzvah. Subsequently Noel moved to Johannesburg to be nearer to Theo and lived there for 10 years. (There is a story for the children of Great Grandpa Noel Kretzmar also).



## Chapter 7: The Grandchildren grow up

Here is a picture of Beryl's six grandchildren grown up.

**Back Row:** Warren, Loren, Seton

**Front Row:** Anthony, Karen and Justin.



None of the grandchildren were even near getting married when Beryl passed away 1989. So she never even knew their chosen partners.

Loren was the first to marry. She married Bert Jansch on the island of Arran in Scotland in November 1999. Gwenda and Theo with Justin and Seton came on planes and trains and ferries to be present.

Bert was a famous guitarist and singer/songwriter. [www.bertjansch.com](http://www.bertjansch.com). They were idyllically happy for 12 years of marriage and some before, working and travelling together around the world. Sadly they both became ill in 2009 and died at the end of 2011 after a final triumphant solo tour of the East Coast of America with Neil Young, and a tour of the UK with Bert's band Pentangle.

In the pictures below we see Loren and Bert at their wedding 1.11.1999 – picture taken in front of a rushing stream on the way from the ceremony to the reception.





Below that their headstones at Highgate Cemetery in London are carved from a boulder that we got from Arran. Karen and I, along with Bert's family have created the Bert Jansch Foundation [www.bertjanschfoundation.org](http://www.bertjanschfoundation.org) where we support young acoustic musicians.





## Chapter 8: Great-Grandchildren



Here (above) are Geraldine's daughter Karen and family at Kew Gardens in a respite from Lockdown and below son Anthony at home on our garden – all in the Summer of 2020





Here is  
Theo and  
families of  
Justin  
right

Warren  
below,  
right

and Seton  
below Left  
in autumn  
**2020.**







Here above is Theo's 83rd birthday in Johannesburg in October 2019

Below is Geraldine's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party which took place in London on 1 March 2020 – just before Lockdown!







So. this is the story of Great Granny Beryl Kretzmar (née Bergman)  
With love to her ten great-grandchildren  
Compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London  
on what would have been Beryl's would be 111<sup>th</sup> birthday, 21 November. 2020