

Harold (Harry) Hecht

Retired Psychiatrist

Melbourne Australia



Harry Hecht says: I was born in **1943** and grew up in Kimberley where we led a happy and sheltered life. I left after school in 1960 aged 17 to go to University in Cape Town. I qualified as a Doctor with MB ChB (UCT) then specialised in Psychiatry, first in the UK MRCPsych (UK) and then I studied further in Australia FRANZCP (Australia)

I married Louise who was a Social Worker from Cape Town on 2 February 1972 in Cape Town. We have two children **Martin and Rozalia** who were born in Cape Town and are now both in Australia with us. I am now a retired psychiatrist, and we live in Melbourne.

My Parents

My father, Frederick (Fritz) Hecht (right) was born in Germany in 1913. He and my mother Ellen née Steinwasser married in Kimberley in 1937. Ellen was also born in Germany in 1913. They lived in Kimberley from 1937 to about 1973.

(In the picture right, Fritz is in Kimberley on leave from the army to attend the birth of his son – me - Harold (who looks a bit furry in this picture).

My parents had arrived in Cape Town together in 1936 having been sponsored by the Sonnenbergs (associated with Woolworths) who were prominent philanthropic sponsors of German Jewish emigres. Fritz and Ellen were close friends in Germany and only got engaged once in Cape Town and married in the Kimberley shul in 1937.



My father Fritz had qualified as an electrical engineer, but his German degree was not recognised in South Africa. He had difficulty finding employment in Cape Town and so found work with De Beers mines in Kimberley where he initially helped run the local Power Station which in those days was owned and run by the company. He later became the planning officer for De Beers involved in planning new mining and technical projects. He also supplemented his income initially by teaching Maths after hours at the Kimberley Technical College.

My mother Ellen also found employment at De Beers in their Stores Buying Department as a bookkeeper. She later for a short while became the Secretary to the Catholic Archbishop of Kimberley and Kuruman -- they needed someone who could correspond in German because their main donors were from Germany. She retired due to ill-health and sadly died in 1970 at the age of just 57. She is buried in Kimberley. My father Fritz retired in 1973 and came to live in Cape Town. He died in 1987 in Cape Town and is buried there.

My Maternal Grandparents

My grandparents, Martin and Meta Steinwasser were both born in Germany. They sailed on the 2nd last Deutsch-Africa line boat to leave Germany for South Africa, before the outbreak of WW2. They wisely boarded the vessel in Rotterdam instead of Hamburg, thereby avoiding potential further harassment. They managed to reach Kimberley in 1939. They were already quite elderly when they arrived in Kimberley in 1939 and became the home keepers and childminder for me, as both my parents needed to work. Martin died there in 1959 and Meta in 1965 they are both buried in the Kimberley cemetery.

My father Fritz Hecht served 'up North' in WW2

My father joined the Kimberley Regiment in 1941 and attended camps in Windhoek and then in 1942, a training camp at Zonderwater near Pretoria for the Signals Division. He was then sent to serve in North Africa in the Battle of El Alamein, and after that went on to Italy. Harry says 'I believe he participated in the Monte Cassino campaign'.



This group photo was taken in 1945 at Lake Como of a Jewish Studies group. Fritz is in 3rd row 4th from the right. I couldn't make out the name of the SADF Jewish chaplain who ran the course.



In this picture Fritz is at the Jewish club in Rome in 1945, waving the Israeli Flag, hopeful of a Jewish State.

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### Harry Hecht writes in October 2018:

Dear Eli and Geraldine, I have only just been made aware of your Kehilalink Website link via Rabbi Gutnick of the East Melbourne Synagogue in Australia.

<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/Home.html>

I celebrated my Barmitzvah in Kimberley in 1956 (8th Heshvan 5717) with **Rabbi Bloch** in charge and then in 2016, I 're-celebrated' the 60th anniversary of my Barmitzvah by reading Maftir and Haftorah in the East Melbourne shul with family and friends present. On that occasion I spoke about some of the history of Kimberley and its Jewish community. I have since rededicated this event each year and this prompted Rabbi Gutnick to forward your link to me.

The photo of the beautiful shul evoked a lot of memories, and I was very interested in reading all the family entries, especially the one from **Marion Lewis** as we had lost touch for a long time -- our families were close friends and distantly related (and both from Germany).

I was also very taken up by **Mike Dalrymple's** account of **Dr Sol Perel and his wife Sybil** (sister of Mike's mother Joyce) as I worked in the medical practice as an assistant GP for a year in 1968 before returning to Cape Town to specialise in Medicine and later in Psychiatry.

Please tell Mike Dalrymple how much I appreciated his account. I have now written to Marion and she sent me her updated family news. Other entries of note for me – **Daphne Gillis, (née Toubé)** was my teacher at Boy's High School and **Rabbi Werner** was a great friend to my family and was a great support to my late mother when she developed cancer and died too early at the age of 57.

Also, **Marshall Hotz** may be interested to know that I had his old Latin textbook from school in which he wrote something to the effect of 'in memory of Marshall Hotz who died at the sight of the matric Latin paper'!!! I'm pleased to know he is alive and well.

I am very pleased that you are dedicated to preserve the memories of the Jewish community.



This picture of our family was taken on the occasion of Rozalia's Batmitzvah in 1989 in Adelaide. It's a lovely picture of me, Louise, Martin and Rozalia.



Here is a picture taken in the Kimberley shul hall in 1950 at a function to commemorate the founding of the State of Israel. At the 1st table 2nd on left facing the camera is Marion Lewis's mother and at the 2nd table facing the camera 1st 2nd and 3rd from the right are my parents and grandmother. I'm sure you'll recognise a lot of others.

**Below** are pictures of my grandparents (Martin and Meta Steinwasser) at their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary celebrations held at the shul hall in Kimberley in May 1954.



This photo would be of interest to other ex-Kimberleyites as it shows Gus Haberfeld and his wife congratulating the couple . I think Gus may have been Mayor of Kimberley at the time.



This picture shows Martin and Meta with Rabbi Bloch and his wife on the left of the picture and me aged 11 on the right of the picture.



Here is a recent picture of me now aged 77 with my son Martin and also my grandson.

With best wishes

Harold (Harry) Hecht.

Email address:

[louiseandharry@netspace.net.au](mailto:louiseandharry@netspace.net.au)

## Harold Hecht

Information and pictures from Harry Hecht, Melbourne Australia

Compiled and edited by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London

Posted originally, October 2018

Updated, December 2019 - updated again October 2021