

## Wilhelm and Alice Witepski and their children

(Written by Leon Chonin- December 2022)

Wilhelm Witepski Hebrew name inscribed on his metzavah was "Izchak ben Uri HaCohen".

Wilhelm and Alice (nee Rothschild) fled from Kassel, Germany in 1930 first settling in Cape Town where they opened a fish shop that provided them with financial support while Wilhelm attended law school as he had to convert his legal qualification by studying Roman Dutch law being the foundation of South African jurisprudence. They moved from Cape Town to Kimberley after Wilhelm completed his studies. Sylvia Apter a very close friend of Ruth their daughter described the Witepski family as follows:

"Alice was a homemaker and did a lot of entertaining. Her apple strudel was the first I ever tasted. I base my score of strudel from hers. The Witepski house was a buzz of culture always hosting foreign visitors while Wilhelm was a witty host with an ever-smiling Alice."

Wilhelm, a practicing advocate took silk which implies being appointed a senior counsel in the late sixties, was appointed a Justice of the Peace to service the rural areas and had to frequently travel into the Northern Cape region. While Wilhelm had a very quiet demeanor, he was nevertheless very forceful when he appeared in court because I have been told that he castigated a presiding judge for not addressing him respectfully with his professional title as Doctor Witepski and not Mister Witepski. Wilhelm must have read for his doctorate degree in law in Germany. Reports about Wilhelm's high profile cases appeared frequently in the local Kimberley newspaper. On one occasion, he made the news after a criminal involved in a case, he was arguing stabbed him.

Wilhelm authored a 62-page German book called "**Die Konkurrenz von Bereicherungsanspruch und Eigentumsanspruch**" which in English means the competition between the claim to enrichment and the claim to property published by Buchdruckerei J. Hamel in 1933.

Referencing the South African Government Gazette on page 215 published on 26 January 1940 Wilhelm was nationalized as a South African citizen on 18 August 1939. It is interesting to note that his occupation was described as a general dealer.

According to Harold Hecht, a close school friend of Michael, Wilhelm's father was a cantor in their local shul in Kassel, Germany. The cantorial background must have contributed to Wilhelm's musical talents as he apparently had a great operatic singing voice. He was a violinist and an enthusiastic admirer of classical music and an art collector.

Alice, nee Rothschild, met Wilhelm when she came to stay with his family in Kassel. Harold confirms that Alice was an accomplished homemaker and a very good cook. She helped Wilhelm socially with his career by being very hospitable. Harold, whose parents also originated from Germany, confirmed that his mother Ellen was very friendly with Alice who had a wide circle of friends as they enjoyed her out-going personality.

Wilhelm had a brother, Gunther, who was a writer and a stage performer in Germany. He appeared in two productions "Humor Und Melodie" in September 1943 and "Bravo Da Capo" in October 1943. He was



Wilhelm and Alice had two children, Michael, and Ruth.

#### Michael Witepski

Michael attended Kimberley Boys High school where he matriculated with a Dux Medal as the best student in standard ten. His name appears on the Honours Board at the school. Michael then attended Cape Town University where he received his law degree after which he moved to Johannesburg where he practiced his profession in law.

Michael married Gene, an estate agent who had grown up in Zambia, and whom he met when both were living in a residential hotel in Hillbrow. The couple had two daughters, Samantha (now 46) and Lisa, 43. Samantha is married to Marc du Chenne and has two children, Jaime (15) and Jonah (11). Lisa, a journalist, is married to James Cloete and has two daughters, Leya (10) and Jessica (7). Both Samantha and Lisa live in Johannesburg.

Like his father, Michael was a great fan of classical music, and loved restaurants, art, travel, the theatre, and opera. He was a devoted family man and adored his grandchildren.

Michael passed away from cancer and was buried at the Johannesburg cemetery on 12 March 2021.



*Michael Witepski and his daughter Lisa*



*Michael Witepski and his daughter Lisa*



*Lisa and her husband James Cloete and their little girl*

Ruth Witepski

Ruth attended Kimberley Girls High school and after school attended a nursery schoolteachers training college in Cape Town. Her studies in Cape Town were interrupted by the passing of her mother when she returned to Kimberley to take care of her father. She then moved to Johannesburg to complete her nursery school training at the teachers' training college in Hillbrow. Ruth developed an interest in the Montessori system of pre-primary education and decided to further her training in Italy where she learnt Italian. After returning to Johannesburg, she found it difficult to find suitable work and decided to change her career path by moving to London to learn about floral arrangements. However, when her father passed away Ruth returned to Johannesburg yet again as a nursery schoolteacher and a florist, she found difficulties finding gainful employment. She decided to return to London where she started employment in the hotel industry as a receptionist. Once again Ruth returned to South Africa and then found employment at the Carlton Hotel downtown Johannesburg and took up residency at a residential hotel in Hillbrow where she met a visiting Japanese man she eventually married and had a daughter Emi.

Because of the discrimination laws in South Africa, Ruth found it difficult to bring up her daughter in a racial society and left to live in Japan. Ruth worked for the American School in Japan as a nursery schoolteacher for over 40 years. She then returned to Durban where her daughter Emi had emigrated. Her daughter like her grandfather, Wilhelm was an acclaimed violinist who performed with the Durban Philharmonic Orchestra.

Ruth was tragically killed in a hit and run accident Erev Yom Kippur in 2019 and buried in Durban. Her Hebrew name inscribed on her metzavah was "Ruth bat Izchak"

*Kimberley Girls High School Matric Dance*



*Back row: Alan Huth, Leon Chonin, Marvin Cohen, Ronnie Heynes, Eric David*

*Front row: Sandra Diamond, Pamela Hotz, Pearly Goldenbaum, Fleur Sack, Ruth Witepski*



*Ruth Witepski as a nursery schoolteacher in Japan*



*Ruth's daughter Emi*



*Ruth's metzavah in Durban*

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