

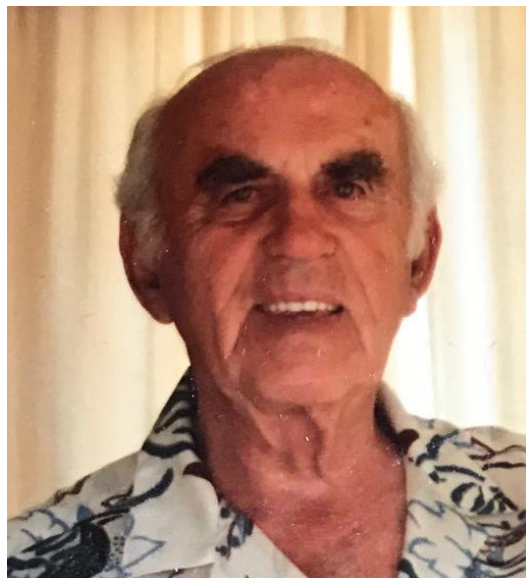
Noel Kretzmar 1899 – 1998

First Specialist Surgeon

in Kimberley and

Man of the World

By his daughter **Geraldine Auerbach (née Kretzmar) MBE London**, December 2019 – updated June 2021 and updated again in March 2022



Before writing my own story, I am writing the story of my parents Noel Kretzmar and Beryl (nee Bergman) – and grandparents – even great grandparents. I have already written about my mother's parents [Bergman, Jacob and Amalie \(nee Friedlander\)](#). In this section I will deal with my father's family, as well as **Noel and Beryl Kretzmar's** life together in Kimberley. It includes the following chapters:

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Chapter 1: Lithuania: Birzh/Simberig 1899 – 1903

My father **Noel Kretzmar** says he was born on 3 August 1899 – in Shomberg, Russia. But was he? First of all, his name was actually **Noach Kretzmer**. At that time, dates of birth, specially for boys, were seldom recorded for fear that Russian Army would pounce. But, when he set out to travel to Edinburgh from Cape Town in early 1919 to study medicine, he needed a passport. So Noach became **Noel**; Kretzmer became **Kretzmar** (which he thought sounded grander); and a birth date was chosen, 3 August 1899.

And, as he had no clear idea of the place where he was born, he vaguely remembers something like Shomberg but not being able to find it on a map – he chose one – on a map of Russia where

he thought he might have come from, and settled on 'Shomberg', in the middle of Russia!! (I can't find that on a map either).

The Kretzmar family actually came from Birzh in the north of Lithuania, in the Kovno Gubernya. The Jews of this area, adjoining Courland in Latvia, were perhaps more enlightened – and felt somewhat superior.



I subsequently realised that Noel's mother Taube Morris and her family came from the nearby shtetl of Simberig – sometimes called Shimberg or Shomberg which was just about 25 miles north of Birzh. It's quite possible that Taube and Tobias went to live there when they got married. It is even more possible that Taube went there with her small children to be with her parents when Tobias set off for South Africa in 1899, and

before emigrating herself with her children to South Africa 1903. So, he seems to have been quite right about where he came from after all!

I wanted to find out more about what life might have been like in Birzh at the time the family lived there. So, I looked on the internet and found some articles by Yosif Rosin on the Birzh Kehilalinks page (also managed by Eli Rabinowitz who makes our Kimberley Jewish Community site with me.)

Birzh - as it was called in Yiddish - (Birzai - in Lithuanian) is situated in the north-eastern part of Lithuania on the shores of the rivers Apascia (pronounced Apashcha) and Agluona and along Lake Siruinis, surrounded by bushy woods, not far from the Latvian border. Jews had settled in Birzh from the second half of the 17th century, being invited to do so by the prince of Radzivill, who wanted to better the economic situation of the town. The Jews could buy the right of settlement in the town and were promised protection from their neighbours.

Most Jews made a living from commerce, trading mainly in flax and wood. Many worked in the big flour mill and in factories in the town. Others were artisans, storekeepers, market traders and peddlers. There were two weekly market days and two, yearly fairs in the town where they would ply their trade and buy their necessities. (We have no idea what the Kretzmer family was involved with in Birzh, but the word means 'innkeeper', so maybe they kept an inn?)

Birzh became famous as a torah study centre. It had a line of famous rabbis. There was a yeshiva and a number of 'chedarim', There were the usual charitable organisations: an old age home and a clinic used also by other small towns of the neighbourhood. Most of the Jews of Birzh were the more enlightened 'Mitnagdim' and had a wide outlook. They employed secular as well as religious teachers in their schools and the children learned German and Russian, though they spoke Yiddish at home. There were also Hassidic minyanim in Birzh, with separate prayer houses.



Noel at times mused as to whether his family might have been Hassidim? He remembers, as a very small child, that his house had a high wooden threshold, (like the one in the picture I found). He also remembers sitting on the knee of a man with a very long beard. But I would think they were not Hassidim, as they were a forward-thinking family – and everyone had a long beard then.

Restrictions on work became crippling and there was no economic future for all these Jews. After the assassination of the somewhat liberalising and reforming Tsar Alexander II in 1881, things got much more difficult for everyone – especially for Jews. They became desperate to leave to escape eternal poverty and have a better life for their families. There were also pogroms and pressure to avoid long periods of Russian army service for their sons, from which many boys never returned.

In 1897, at the time when many Jews were seriously thinking of emigrating, Birzh had 4,413 residents. Of those, 1,255 were Catholics, 581 Protestants and 2,510 were Jews – **57% of the population!** Shipping companies sent representatives to the shetlach (the small towns) who helped many Jews from Lithuania and Latvia, like Noel's father Tuvye, to book passages to South Africa. Tuvye (later known in South Africa as Tobias) left for South Africa with many other emigrants in 1899, leaving his wife and 4 children (including baby Noel) behind until he could make a living and send for them. He was going to join his youngest brother **Willie** already there. They were later to be joined by second youngest brother **Sam**.

Leaving Lithuania was a hugely significant decision. **For those that remained in Birzh**, there was not a happy outcome in the 20th Century. In 1915, during WW I, all the Jews were summarily expelled, at a few days' notice, from Birzh by the Russian authorities into the depths of Russia (being suspected of being on the German side). Many returned after the war to pick up the pieces, and in the period of Independent Lithuania and Latvia from 1918 – 1940 carried on with their previous occupations and improved their positions slightly. By 1929 Birzh had a Jewish physician and a Jewish lawyer. The 'Jewish People's Bank' branch had 321 members. Several factories for weaving and spinning linen were owned by Jews.

By 1940, when Lithuania was annexed by the Soviet Union, there were about 3,000 Jews in Birzh (36% of the population). From the beginning of the war (September 1, 1939) nationalistic gangs of Lithuanians, organized and armed, were already active in the town, harassing the Jews and murdering them. But much worse was to come.

On Thursday, June 26, 1941 four days after the German attack on Russia, the German army took Birzh. Among the first victims were two physicians and Rabbi Jehuda Leib Bernstein. A young man who tried to defend the rabbi was shot dead on the spot. The family of a Jewish lawyer was denounced to the killers by Lithuanian 'friends' and all of them were brutally killed. The schochet (ritual slaughterer) was tied to the tail of a galloping horse and driven through the town and thus most brutally murdered.

On July 26, on orders from the Germans, all the Jews were concentrated in a ghetto comprising a few lanes around the synagogue and prayer house. They were guarded by the same organized nationalistic Lithuanian gangs who were used as auxiliary police by the Germans. Jewish men were periodically taken from the ghetto and murdered in the Jewish cemetery or in other places in the town and its neighbourhood.

On August 8, 1941 the ghetto was liquidated. The Jews were taken in groups of 100-200 souls to the forest of Astrava. There, huge pits had been dug beforehand. The Lithuanians pushed the Jews into them and shot them there. Valuables taken from the Jews were delivered to the Germans or divided among the Lithuanian murderers. Noel's Aunt Hinda and her husband Shlomo Nachamowitz and their younger son Eliyahu, were all caught up in this and murdered on that date. After the war mass graves were found in the Jewish cemetery and in the Astrava forest.

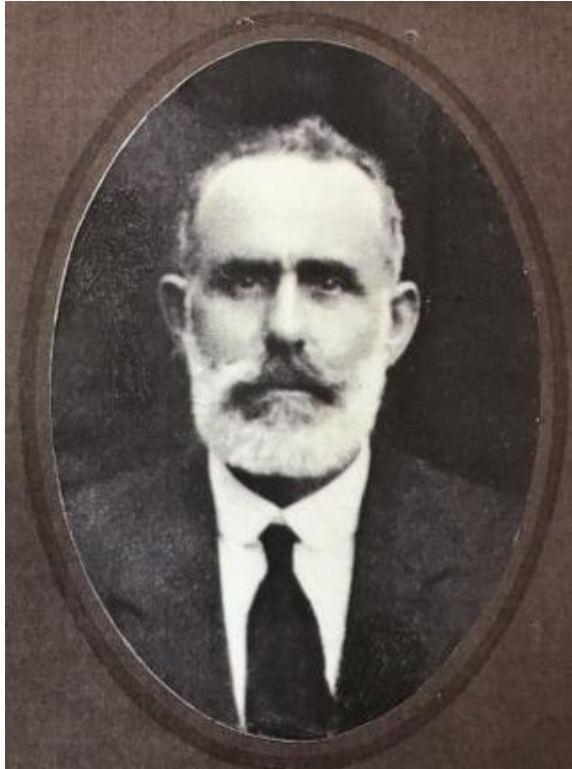


A fence was put around them and "victims of fascism" written on the memorial tablet.

In this picture we see Birzh castle and lake. A beautiful place!

Birzh Jewish Community Memorial 2019

In 2019 descendants of families of the Birzh victims under the leadership of Able and Glenda Levitt of Cape Town, created, funded and unveiled a marvellous memorial in the forest. They worked with were encouraged by the local 'Tolerance Centre' of Lithuanians who are educating their young about what happened then. To read more and see a film of this memorial and ceremony go to the end of this story. ~~~~~



But to get back to our family:

My fathers' father was Tuvye Kretzmer, known as Tobias when he got to South Africa.

His father was YEHUDA LEIB KRETZMER born c 1845 in Birzh, Lithuania. Yehuda Leib married c1865 BEILA BILHA KATZ (b c1850 in Birzh). They had 8 children. Most managed to emigrate in time to the USA or South Africa – but Tobias' sister Hinda remained in Birzh and she and her family were murdered when the Nazis moved into Birzh in August 1941.

Tobias' brothers and sisters were:

1. SARAH KRETZMER, b. c 1866, Birzh, Lithuania.(married Moshe (Maishe) Morris brother of Tobias wife Taube Morris)
2. **TOBIAS (TUVYE) KRETZMER, (left) b 1867, Birzh, Lithuania; d 1926 Malmesbury, South Africa (aged 59).**
3. ELIYAHU KRETZMER, b. 1871, Birzh, Lithuania; d. Birzh, Lithuania.(We don't know anything about him)
4. ISAAC (YITZCHAK) KRETZMER, b. 1872, Birzh, Lithuania; d. USA. (We don't know anything about him)
5. HINDA KRETZMER, b. 1876, Birzh, Lithuania; **d. 08 08 1941, Murdered with her husband Schlomo Nachamowitz and son Eliyahu** b. 1917 by the Nazi's with Litvak collaboration in Birzh. Her daughter Bilha Joffe (b. c1915) who managed to get to Israel on Kibutz Gad, says that her mother told her there were 5 sisters that settled in the USA! (so, several may be missing from this list)
6. JACOB (YAACOV) KRETZMER, b. 1880, Birzh, Lithuania. (mentioned by Tobias' son Julius, but we know nothing about him.)
7. SAMUEL (SHMUEL) KRETZMER, b. 1883, Birzh, Lithuania; d. 29 07 1963, Emigrated to South Africa and settled in Heilbron, father of Haim who became a doctor in Bulawayo and Bernard who worked for his cousin Basil in his carpet emporium in Kroonstad then Johannesburg
8. WILLIAM (WOLF) KRETZMER, b. 01 04 1884, Birzh, Lithuania; d. 25 01 1965, Johannesburg, South Africa. Married Tilly, and they lived in Kroonstad in the Orange Free State. Their four sons were: Eliot (who became Mayor of Johannesburg in the late 1990s,) Herbert (journalist and lyricist including of Les Misérables) Ivor (a dentist) and Basil (who ran a big carpet shop in Kroonstad, and Johannesburg, employing his nephews and cousins).



My father's mother was Taube Moras Morris

Tobias (b. 1867) was reputedly a learned scholar. He married in 1892, Taube Moras Morris (b 1873) in Shimberig, Lithuania – (this was apparently a small shtetl north of Birzh near the Latvian Border) (He would have been 25 and she 19.)

Taube's brother Maish Morris married Tobias' older sister Sarah Kretzmer).

She was said to be an independent thinker for her age and might have encouraged him to find a better life in South Africa. They had 4 children before he left for the Cape at the end of 1899: David about 6, Leah 4, Freda 2 and baby Noel. (presumably they were still called Kretzmer till 1919).

From our second cousin on the Morris side Phyllis Cohen we have a family tree that shows the family on her side. You can see this at the very end of the story. (You can see this family tree at the end of the story)

Tobias and Taube (née Morris) and their 7 Children



Here is a lovely picture of Tobias and Taube in Malmesbury.

Their children were

1. DAVID GEORGE KRETZMAR, b. 1893, Shimberig or Birzh, Lithuania; d. 02 1924, Cape Town, South Africa of TB
2. LEAH KRETZMAR, b. 1895, Shimberig or Birzh, Lithuania; d Cape Town South Africa 1970s
3. FREDA KRETZMAR, b. 1897, Shimberig or Birzh, Lithuania; d Johannesburg South Africa 1980s
4. NOACH (later Noel) KRETZMAR, b. 1899, Shimberig or Birzh Lithuania, Africa.d Johannesburg January 1998

After Taube was able to join him in South Africa in 1903 another three children were born:

5. ARNOLD ABRAHAM KRETZMAR, b. 1905, Malmesbury, South Africa; d. 30 04 1990, Pretoria, South Africa.
6. JULIUS HAROLD (YEHUDA) KRETZMAR, b. 10 09 1907, Malmesbury, South Africa; d. 31 10 1995, Cape Town, South Africa.
7. ASHNE KRETZMAR, b. 10 09 1913, Malmesbury, South Africa; d. c2007, Johannesburg, South Africa.(on Julius's birthday!

Having no commercial skills and speaking only Yiddish, not the local English or Afrikaans, Tuvye (later Tobias) struggled to find a way to earn money to bring his wife and four children to join him. He had arrived at the end of 1899, just as the Boer War had started and so he could not proceed to Johannesburg where most employment was to be found. And Cape Town was swelling with ever more Jews coming off the boats – as well as those coming off trains from up North, escaping the war in the Transvaal. Thankfully, there were family and friends at hand like Maishe Rubin, who could help and who tried to set the new arrivals on a suitable path to make a living.

Tuvya's Letters to Taube at home in Lithuania

We know what he did as **Noel's mother Taube** kept all the letters (in Yiddish) that Tuvya had written to her, hoping that with God's blessing everything would come right. Decades later, Noel's brother Julius had them translated into English, giving a window into that life. He started by selling eggs, but soon found that he could not carry enough – and it was too far to go back to the depot for more. (Noel reading these was frustratingly saying – 'why did he not employ a piccanin to carry some eggs, or find an old pram to load them on?') Then Tobias tried being a glazier but found he could not stand heights. You can read extracts of these poignant and tender letters here [Letters sample](#)

19.09.2020 Phil Kretzmar wrote to families of second cousins around the world: I wanted to let you know that after many months and much work, the letters that Tuvye Kretzmar wrote from Cape Town to his wife Taube in Lithuania, from 1899 to 1903 are now up on the Kaplan Centre website. The Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies is part of the University of Cape Town. You will find them, and an Introduction to the letters, at [Tuvya Kretzmar letters complete](#) As a collection, they provide an interesting insight into the immigrant experience in South Africa, as well as shining a light into our family history.

Part of Gwynne Shrire (Robins)'s introduction used a lot of material from an article my dad (Julius) wrote in 1986 for the South African magazine Jewish Affairs, about growing up in Malmesbury, a small town near Cape Town. It provides a picture of life as it was for him growing up and for his family in the first quarter of the last century. Hopefully, you will also find it interesting reading.

Eventually he moved 26 miles north to Malmesbury in the wheat-lands, where he was able to start a general dealers store. At last, in 1903, he could send for **Taube and their children, David now about 10, Leah 8, Freda 6 and Noel 4**

One can imagine the difficulty for Taube, of the arduous journey with four young children and baggage as well as the necessary candlesticks and dozen or so large prayer-books which could not be abandoned in the old country. Keeping everything together on rickety trains across many frontiers before setting sail via various boats and ports, must have been no picnic. The story goes that on one station – the train pulled out without Noel. When she raised the alarm and told the train guard that she had lost one of her children, the guard apparently said – never mind you still have another three!

Thank goodness the family was re-united before going much further. The fate of the family would have been very different without the pivotal role that Noel played, in years to come. It was apparently quite a shock for him to meet his father for the first time at the age of about 4. As we have seen, three more children were to be born in South Africa: Arnold in 1905, Julius in 1907 and Ashne 1913.

Chapter 2: Malmesbury, Cape, South Africa 1903 – 1919



The grand family house in Malmesbury

Life in Malmesbury was tranquil and the family was glad to be re-united and doing well. The older children were excelling in their studies at school and also helping in the general dealer's store when they could.

When the younger children were teenagers, without radio or television of course, the family entertained and educated themselves together, with readings aloud from Shakespeare or CJ Langenhoven the Afrikaans poet. Freda played the piano, Arnold the saxophone and Julius clarinet. As the windows to the house were always open for fresh air and the house was right on the street, there were often small crowds gathering on the pavement to listen to the music.

Tobias was an ardent Zionist and attended the South African Zionist council meeting in Cape Town in 1926.



In this lovely picture above, taken in Malmesbury, we see, left to right, Noel, standing next to Tobias with Arnold on his knee, David, Leah, Taube and Freda. Julius is the cute baby on the table.

As a young child, Noel had always **felt the urgency to get on in life quickly – so that he ‘could help his father’**. Being able to read the Chumash from top to bottom aged five, Noel was disgusted when he went to school and they started asking him to say a-a – b-b! He raced through school, winning the prizes for English and Dutch, asking to skip Standard 6 in his urgency to matriculate without delay.

His motto was ‘Aim High! There is plenty of room at the top.

The picture below is the Synagogue in Malmesbury active from 1911 to 1985. Noel says he does not know which his barmitzvah portion was as he knew them all!

Now it is the town museum with the ark section dedicated to the Jewish community. Julius has supplied pictures and artefacts for this.



Skipping a year was fortuitous, as in his ambition to study medicine he was able to get the first years' pre-qualifications at the University of Cape Town in 1918 and as soon as WW1 was over, he was thus able to set sail for Edinburgh on 1 February 1919 on board RMS 'Llanstephan Castle', second class, to begin his medical studies.

It had been a huge struggle for the family to send Noel to University in Cape Town and then to study overseas. But they were determined that he should go and qualify in the field he chose. They saved up and had to borrow from his teachers and others in Malmesbury in order to fulfil the family ambition.

A few years earlier when their first and equally brilliant son David had raced through school as the top student in the Cape Colony and won a scholarship to Cape Town University, it had been impossible for the family to house and support him at University and the opportunity was lost. David never found his vocation and sadly contracted Tuberculosis, from the poor conditions in which he was living in Cape Town. In 1924, aged 28. while Noel was away studying, David sadly died, devotedly nursed by his sister Freda during the two years of his illness.



On the right, Noel is pictured aged 19, with his two older sisters Leah and Freda, just before he left for Edinburgh

Chapter 3: Edinburgh, Scotland 1919 – 1925

While the new family was growing up in Malmesbury, Noel was meantime, putting his heart and soul into his medical studies in Edinburgh.

He had no money for entertainments and had to put paper in his shoes to patch the holes in the soles. In his quest to get on quickly and 'help his father' and family, he had passed all his exams and qualified as a Doctor in Edinburgh by 1922 with the MB ChB, also LRCP and LRCS and in Glasgow (also in 1922) he earned his LRFP & S

Thereafter, he did his **practical training in England and Scotland**, starting in January 1922 as a Senior House Officer at the Royal Infirmary, Greenock, near Glasgow, for nine months.

In these pictures (top with his friends Hymie Penn, middle, and another in the trio on the right) still seems to have had time for some fun.

Noel then worked at the County Hospital in Bedford, England till June 1923. After that he was appointed as Resident Surgical Officer at the district infirmary Ashton-under-



Lyne, near Manchester that served a quarter of a million people.

For 18 months he was personally responsible for the medical treatment of all the patients and performed most of the large operations. He also spent 6 months in Paris studying midwifery.

After this practical training, in 1925, he went back to Edinburgh University (below) for further study and passed the examinations for FRCS - **Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh** and thus he was also qualified as a Surgeon.

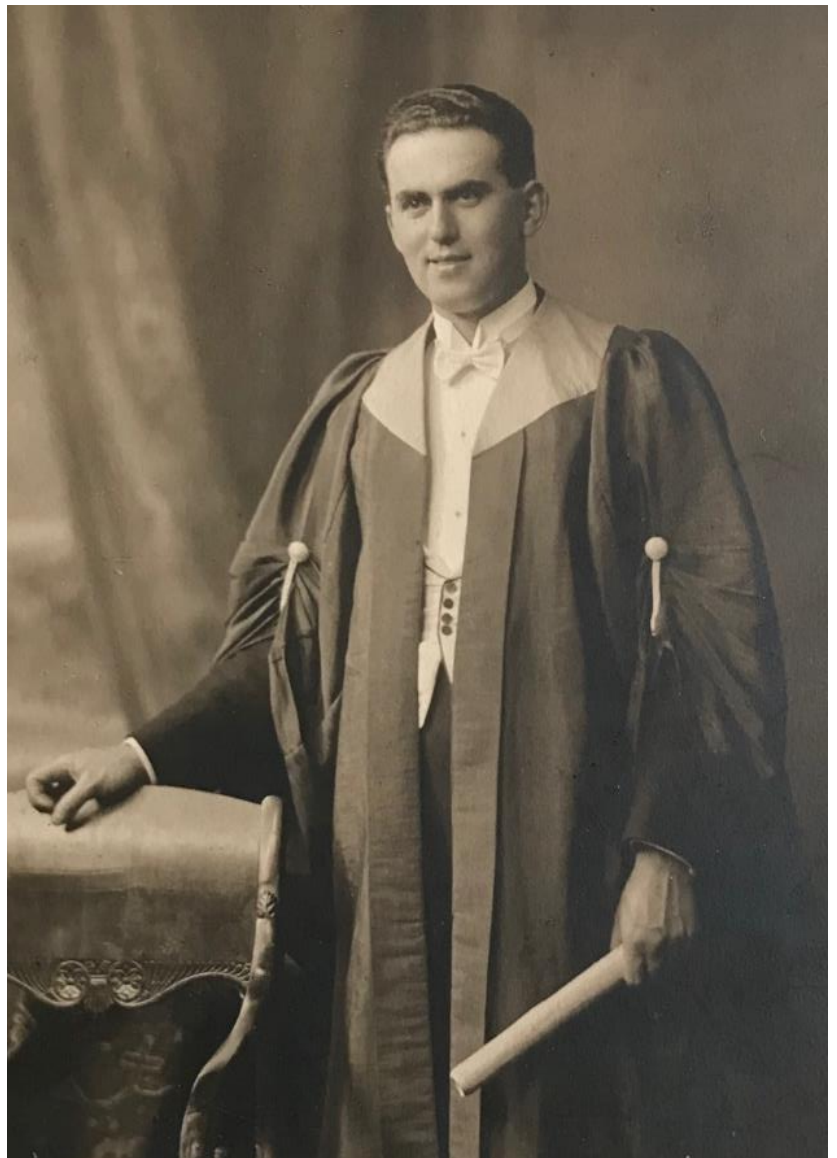


Returning home

In October 1925, after seven long years away collecting every necessary qualification, the 26-year-old, boarded the Natal Direct Line, **SS Umvolosi as a Ship's Surgeon** to return home.

For his services on board ship, to anyone requiring medical attention, he was given a free passage from London to Natal and mess in the Saloon as an Officer, together with the princely remuneration of one shilling a month, on completion of the voyage!

Exactly 50 years later, in 1975, we paid a visit to his alma mater Edinburgh University with Noel, where he gave a talk to the Edinburgh University Historical Society on 'Early Medicine on the Diamond Fields'. You can read it [here](#) on the Kimberley Jewish Community website.



He kept all his student tickets and certificates which I show a sample of below



He was finally home, fully qualified and ready to start his medical career as a doctor and as a specialist surgeon. It was in the nick of time.

When he returned, his father was already gravely ill and died soon after. He is buried in Malmesbury – in the Jewish graveyard which was part of some Boer's farm. (Noel took us to see it in the 1990s on one of our holidays with him.) This left his mother with his two unmarried older sisters, his two younger brothers and a younger sister, in Malmesbury, with scant means of support.!

Chapter 4: A Batchelor in Kimberley 1926 – 1935



Noel had stopped over in the diamond city on the train journey north from Cape Town to seek his fortune.

In Kimberley, he saw a substantial hospital, a beautiful synagogue (both are pictured here at about that time –looking quite similar with palm trees in front).

What was helpful in Kimberley at the time a doctor did not need to hire and furnish his own surgery. The local pharmacists provided a Consulting Room free of charge (his benefit being that the chemist shop was the waiting room and ready to make up the prescription). He found that resident pharmacist, Joe Sperber, had a room at the back of his shop that he was willing to let to Noel as a Doctor's Surgery. This was the custom at the time. They even carried out some 'day case' surgery there. (This rather doubtful ethical state was stopped by law later on, but it helped one to start in those difficult times.) Noel started general practice there in January 1926.



Having put up his plate and started practice, he immediately bought a house at 34 Carrington Road (pictured left) and **brought his mother and brothers and sisters to Kimberley so that he could now take his father's place to support them all.**

He was thus to house them, provide for them, educate them and marry his sisters off, before he could think of himself and

his own needs and loves. A few months after they settled in Kimberley, his mother sadly also passed away, leaving the children orphans. Ashne was only 13!

Noel's sister Freda remembers her hard work, running the home for a busy doctor and her siblings, as well as playing hostess for the bachelors of Kimberley who congregated at the house of an evening and weekend. As you can imagine, Noel had his plate full at the time. He had his new burgeoning medical practice, where he also was awarded a railway sick fund contract and looking after De Beers patients. He was also settling into the social life of Kimberley centred round the golf course, the races, the poker table and the stock exchange. And he also had the responsibility of having to be the breadwinner and nurturer of his mother and 5 siblings.



He clearly did well at Golf in those early days. I have a newspaper cutting from the DFA (the local paper, the Diamond Fields Advertiser) of 10 August 1933, that has a headline under GOLF BATTLES: **'Dr N Kretzmar's nett score of 64'**. With a subheading: 'Best Returned in Rhodes Competition.' It goes on to say: The weather conditions were ideal after many weekends of cold winds. Dr N Kretzmar, whose

play has vastly improved during the past few weeks, returned a phenomenal net score of 64, probably the best net score ever returned in a Rhodes Competition.' Wow, I knew he had played a bit of golf – but not with such aplomb! With partner Dr A Hill, Noel went on to take the Thal prize as well. Further down that article in the women's section I noticed that a certain Miss A Kretzmar and Miss B Bergman, tied for first place with another couple – who beat them in the playoff. All this shows a lot of activity on the links.

Noel (above right) pictured with his brother Julius (on the left) **had met Beryl Bergman** soon after his arrival in Kimberley, having been invited to Shabbos Dinner at the Bergman's.



Beryl was a schoolgirl of 15 at the time, (born November 1909) but Noel remembers being captivated by her long, beautiful hair and her poise and charm. He determined right then that she would figure in his life.

However, it was to be a long time before they could actually get together as a couple.

Thoughts now turned to **marriage for his sisters**, Freda and older sister Leah.

Apparently (according to Freda's daughter Taubene) Leah wished for a man who wore glasses and was intelligent. Freda wanted a man who could make a speech in public. Both were suitably rewarded. **Leah**, in the early 30s met and married bespectacled jeweller Harry Levy, and settled in Kroonstad. They had one daughter **Thelma** b 1933. **Freda** at the same time, married Kimberley attorney Nappy (Harry) Frank.

At first, they lived as a couple in the house with Noel and the family, before moving to their own house in Kimberley when Noel eventually married. Thereafter, Freda and Nappy followed the clients from a depressed Kimberley to the burgeoning cities around the rich gold mines of the East Rand and settled in Springs. They had one daughter **Taubene** also b 1933. Each of the sisters had first had a son who had tragically died in different sad circumstances. Freda through a botched labour with a big overdue baby and Leah through infection following circumcision.

This was not the end of the family's medical traumas. Brother **Arnold contracted Tuberculosis**. Noel was determined not to lose another brother. There were no anti-biotics then, so he had to devise and improvise treatment. Noel treated Arnold with advanced even experimental treatment, collapsing one lung at a time, giving each lung time to recover. The treatment worked, and Arnold lived to the ripe old age of 87.

Now came the task of setting up **the brothers in professions**. Arnold was articled to a law firm in Bloemfontein then Pretoria. He married Rita, very late in life, and had one son Allan. Brother Julius followed Noel's path to medical studies in Edinburgh and came back to join Noel in

General Practice in Kimberley. He married Althea Katz of Durban in 1950 and they had two sons, Phillip now settled in Ottawa with his wife Karina and three children and David in Cape Town with second wife Leigh and son Matthew. (David's first wife Benice (Datnow, daughter of Mike and Marie Datnow of Kimberley) sadly died of breast cancer when daughters Janna and Samantha were small). The youngest sister Ashne went into the Air Force in WW2, eventually marrying Harold Shapiro in 1948 and moving to Vryheid. Their children were Etta (deceased in about 2015) and Tevis.



Chapter 5: Marriage to Beryl Bergman 1935



Nearly ten years after he had first met her – Beryl had grown into a beautiful woman and he finally proposed. They were married in 1935 in the Kimberley shul.

To read about Beryl's parents Jacob and Amalie Bergman and family, read my story of the 'Bergman Family' on their own page or on my page. [Bergman, Jacob and Amalia, \(née Friedlander\)](#) [Auerbach, Geraldine, \(nee Kretzmar\)](#)

Noel's sister Freda and her husband 'Nappy' Frank 'gave Noel away' as both his parents, Tobias and Taube Kretzmar, as we have seen, had already sadly passed away.



Left we see Beryl on the porch of her parents' house, 22 Milner Street on her wedding day and righafter the ceremony emerging from the synagogue.





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. The bouquets were rather large in those days, and the ladies' hats certainly worn at a very rakish angle. No sign of the Top Hats they wore, but a very elegant picture indeed, nevertheless.



The honeymoon was going to be a trip 'overseas' to England and 'The Continent'. But alas the stock exchange played havoc with that idea and they had to be satisfied with a **trip to Durban** instead. They seem pretty happy with this solution – February 1935.

Below is a picture of Beryl and Noel. It looks like they are at the races



As you can see Beryl was tall and elegant, with long black hair which she wore tied up in a bun at the back. It was the height of elegance.



(Beryl seems to have had the Friedlander tall gene from her mother or possibly her grandfather Friedlander. The other three daughters were quite short like Jacob Bergman.)



Beryl was born in Kimberley in 1909 second of the four daughters of Jacob and Amalie Bergman. She spent her early childhood in Schmitsdrift, where she and younger sister Hannah and cousin Kate had roamed free in the natural habitat, collecting pretty stones and picking wild flowers by the riverside. With a sympathetic governess they observed and learned the laws of nature. Beryl recalled that as a golden time. I'm not sure at what stage the family moved to Kimberley – but probably for schooling for their daughters.

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, who had arrived in 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 had many pressing things to deal with while she grew up and they eventually got engaged and married.



Chapter 6: Noel's Medical Career in Kimberley 1926 – 1989

In this picture Beryl and baby Theodore are at the entrance to 88 Dutoitspan Road, Noel's Surgery /Consulting Rooms. I have on my desk in London that very same round brass 88 sign that I use as a tea coaster and in my garden I have the same brass plate with Noel Kretzmar's name on it.

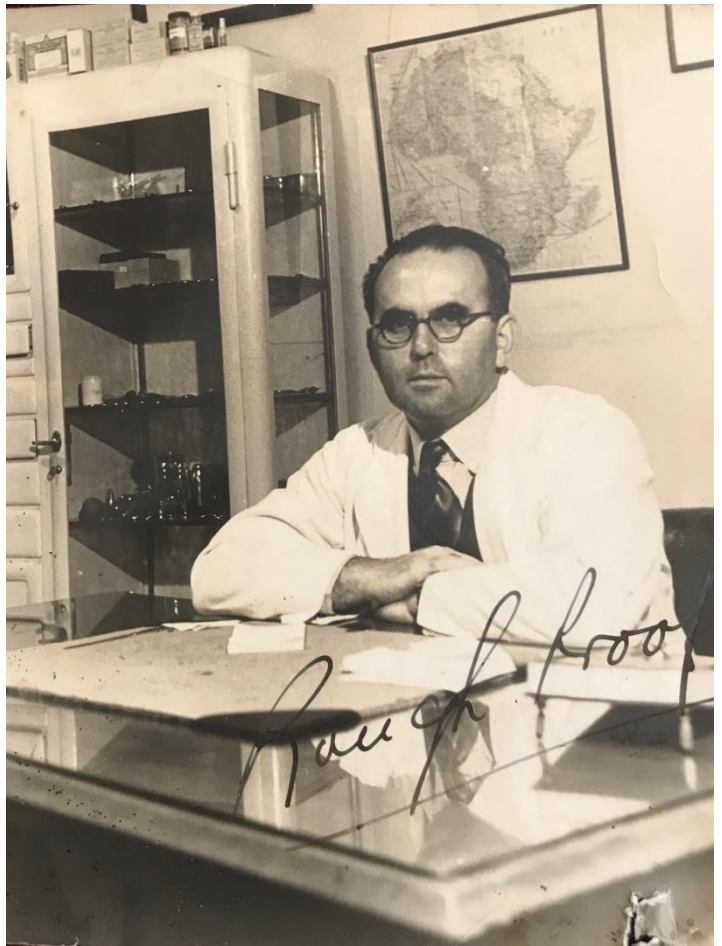
He practiced as a General Practitioner in Kimberley from 1926 to 1947.

In 1947 he took the family to London and New York to refresh himself as a surgeon (a qualification he got originally in 1925) and in 1948 went onto the specialist register as the

First General Surgeon in Kimberley.

He continued working to relieve the suffering of his fellow man until his 90th birthday in 1989 – 63 years of dedicated work in Kimberley including a spell as Medical Superintendent of the Kimberley hospital and latterly as a stalwart of the workmen's injuries staff.

He quickly earned the **respect and admiration of his patients and colleagues** – and particularly the nurses, who trusted in him completely. He not only treated private patients, but he had a contract to look after the medical and surgical needs of the great Kimberley diamond firm De Beers and also the Railway Sick Fund. He upheld the highest standards of medicine and ethics in his practice.



(In the picture on the right, he is sitting at his consulting room table at 88 'Pan Road with his instrument cabinet behind him)

During WWII, he created and chaired the important **Red Cross Medical Depot** in Kimberley. He also initiated and chaired the **Kimberley General Practitioners' Pool**, an innovative and much envied system whereby the pooling of the income among the practitioners who remained and

cared for the population of Kimberley remunerated also those doctors who had gone on active service.



On a national level he served as a delegate from the Griqualand West Branch of the Medical Association of South Africa from 1927. He was a representative on the Federal Council and very proud to have been awarded the **Bronze Medal** for meritorious service in 1968.

He attended national and international Surgical Conferences in South Africa and overseas. He pioneered work on **pneumothorax** in tuberculosis and was the second South African to use the **Smith Peterson pin** in the repair of fracture in the neck of the femur. He published several articles in the South African Medical journals.

Here is what **Professor Charlotte Searle** said about him. Searle, Professor of Nursing at Pretoria University was the doyen of the South African nursing profession. She was a founder member of both the SA Nursing Council and the SA Nursing Association. She wrote the definitive history of nursing in South Africa and this and her other books have been the standard works for successive generations of nursing students for many years. One of her proudest achievements came in 1955 when she was responsible for the introduction of the first basic nursing degree courses in Africa. she was a tireless fighter for nurses' (of all colours) rights.

She wrote to Noel in 1971 when he congratulated her on some aspect of her work: 'Please remember that though I have made some contribution to health services in South Africa, there is still much I would like to do. One thing I am very grateful for is that I had the privilege to learn at the Kimberley hospital which set me off on the path I have followed all these years. I had the privilege to work under men I respected and loved. In particular I owe you a lot for you were never satisfied with mediocrity, you were ever generous with professional guidance and willing to share your knowledge with a student nurse. I have never forgotten it. I firmly believed that it was your standards and your teaching, that made a good nurse out of a madcap. (And did you ever know that the nurses referred to you as that 'Heart Throb?')

She later wrote 'I'll never, never forget you and how much I learnt from, you in your daily work at the Kimberley Hospital. I watched you, admired your high standards and learnt all I could. You have a big share in this award' I have been given.

After the War, he was determined to carry out his lifelong ambition to go on to the specialist register as a **Specialist Surgeon**. He had qualified with a Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh in 1925, but felt that now, 20 years later, he needed to have a refresher course. It was very difficult to get a passage to London as the boats were booked up for over a year ahead. Eventually the family boarded the Athlone Castle on 4 August 1947 bound for London and an international surgical Conference.

We also sailed to New York where he visited surgeons he had met in London to see the latest techniques and facilities. We also had the opportunity of visiting many family members of his mother Taube who had settled in America. We actually flew home – in those early days on intercontinental flight in 1948. It took about three days, leaving from La Guardia Airport New York and flying via the Azores, Dakar and Accra before arriving safely at Palmietfontein Airport outside Johannesburg. Quite an adventure.

Once home he was appointed a General Surgeon in Kimberley – and of course he did everything in those days – abdominal surgery, Obstetrics and Gynae even Ear Nose and Throat surgery. Gradually those specialists arrived in Kimberley one by one and built up a strong specialist centre. He continued in medical practice in Kimberley until his 90th birthday, when sadly Beryl died and he sold up his flat and surgery and moved to Johannesburg to be nearer to Theodore and family.

Other interests

In Kimberley, Noel found the warmth and space to develop his many other interests which included farming, building small holdings, golf and the stock market. Here he also found his beloved wife Beryl (née Bergman) with whom he shared 54 years of happy marriage. He served as **President of the Griqualand West Hebrew Congregation, from 1945- 47** insisting on the creation of an endowment fund for the preservation of the synagogue buildings and environs, for which the community to this day is very grateful.

His passion for gold and the stock exchange was prodigious. His exploits brought drama to his and his family's life. They ranged from a sad exposure to 'Treasure Troves' which he had high hopes for – but which sadly proved to be worthless, to excellent investments that led him to be suspected (mistakenly) of 'insider trading'

He bought a **farm called Paardekraal** (Horse Paddock) about 50 miles from Kimberley and enjoyed working with his Afrikaner manager with flocks of sheep, horses and dairy cattle – in succession, finding out the joys and pitfalls of each. As children we used to be up and 6 on Sunday morning once a month, to drive the 50 miles or so beyond Schmidtsdrift.

If we stayed overnight – we went to the neighbouring farm of **Papkuil** where proprietor Hans Gers had a 'hotel'. There was a long strip of open stoep, along which were bedrooms for the night. He also had a petrol pump. I had heard that he might have been Jewish, so I was delighted to find on the internet that Papkuil is still a place of resort – this time a Safari Park and also hunters paradise. And it is still in the hands of the Gers family. This is the correspondence I had with Julius Gers in January 2018 when I made an enquiry.

To: gerson@netralink.com **Subject:** History

I was thinking about Papkuil and the Gers family – so was very pleased to come across your site and excited to know that the Gers family are still at Papkuil and have such a lovely Safari Lodge.

My father, Dr Noel Kretzmar from Kimberley had a farm, Paardekraal in the area in the 1940s and 50s when I was growing up. I now live in London – and have made a website for the Kimberley Jewish Community. I had an idea that maybe the Gers family had some Jewish antecedents. Is that so?

I got an immediate response:

Hi Geraldine! `Great to hear from you, Paardekraal is my neighbour, now belong to the Brits family. My father died when I was young, did not know about my ancestry, but was fortunate to go back to Zondershouzen in Germany where they came from. My family were Jews, and was very active in the community there. They did a study on the Jews of Zond and in particular the Gers family. I am the 4th generation here, but the property never went from one Gers generation to the next. Always been sold to "outsiders" and then bought back again. Kind regards from a dry Ghaap plateau !

Julius Gers



PAPKUIL SAFARI LODGE - GERS SAFARIS

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Chapter 7: Family Life in Kimberley 1936 - 1957



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



Three years later, I (Geraldine) arrived in January 1940



The Bergman/ Kretzmar Family in Kimberley



Above is an amazing picture I found of the Kretzmar/Bergman family women and children in Kimberley probably c1938. In the back row are: Beryl's sister Hilda (Hendler), Noel's sister Ashne Kretzmar, and Beryl's sister Hannah Bergman. In the front is Beryl's friend Bertie Sperber, Beryl, Hilda's son Owen Hendler, Noel's sister Freda (Frank), Beryl's mother Amalie Bergman, with probably baby Theodore on her lap, and Beryl's cousin Kate Friedman (nee Bergman) with her son David Friedman on her lap. The girls in the middle row are Hilda's daughter Lola Hendler, Freda's daughter Taubene Frank and Bertie's daughter Shirley Sperber. (Somehow, Hilda's younger son Herbert is missing from this picture)



Left is a rare picture of all the Kretzmar siblings together as adults. At the Back are Julius, Arnold and Noel and at the front Ashne, Freda and Leah. Perhaps it was at Arnold's or Julius's wedding in 1950.

Holidays

Kimberley was very hot in the summer and as a family we always went to Cape Town or its neighbour Muizenberg for a lovely beach holiday. When Beryl complained about the strong south-easters, we tried nearby Fishhoek. We once went to Summerset Strand,

but the wind there was even worse with sand stinging our skins. We always came back to Muizenberg as the most exhilarating.

Below, we are on holiday - photographed in the lion booth on Muizenberg beach December 1940
Many families may have such pictures.



And left on the beach in December 1941



Below I am at my first performance at about 5 with Miss Timlin's dance co,



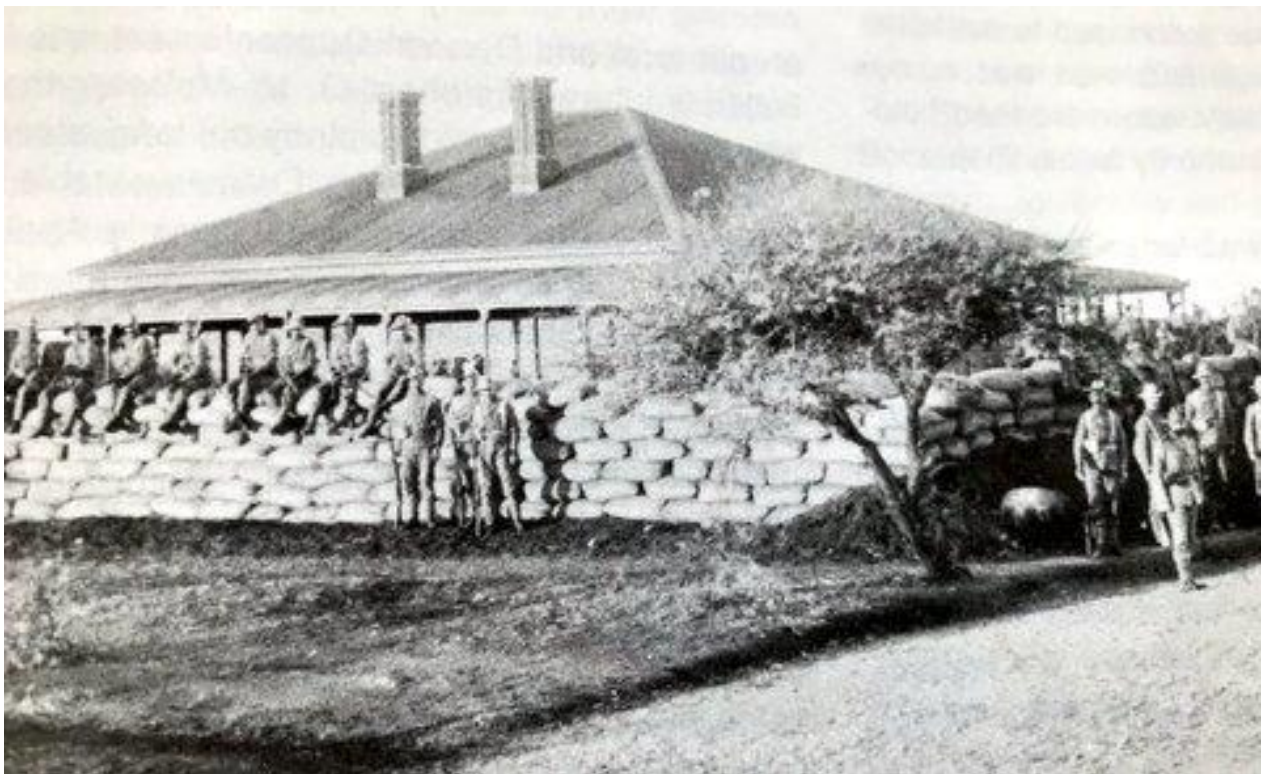
Our House – Kumo

In 1945, Beryl and Noel, with Theodore and Geraldine, moved from 34, down the road to a bigger house called **Kumo**, at **42 Carrington Road**, on the corner of Dalham Road.

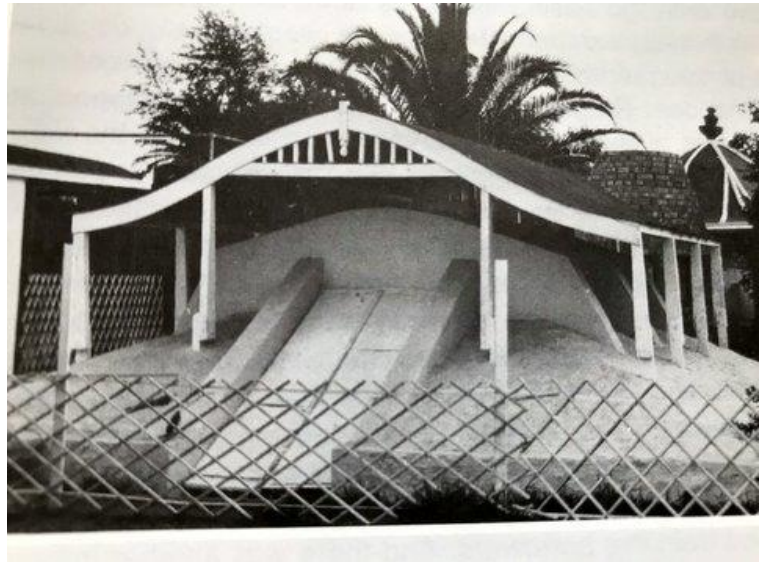
Designed by the most renowned Kimberley architect D.W Greatbatch, (who also designed the Synagogue and the magnates house at 10 Lodge Road) it had been built in 1898 for a local chemist, Mr Nelson Otto Ruffel and was then on the outskirts of the town. It has a hipped roof, a small decorated gable above the front door and a bullnose veranda all round. Mr Ruffel was Swedish, so it is presumed that it is named 'Kumo', after the Swedish foe a municipality in Finland – or the Japanese word for 'spider' or 'cloud'!



Almost immediately it was commandeered and turned into a fort during the siege of Kimberley (1899-1900). The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment built the fortified positions there as we see, when they were resident 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)

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 she, nevertheless, put her stamp on the décor and furnishings.



Noel loved its outdoor spaces and having tea on the furthest reaches of the lawn. The tennis court was not utilised to the optimum, but he built a 'swimming pool' behind it which was a magnet for our family and friends in the scorching Kimberley summers. It was the first private swimming pool in Kimberley and was more like a rectangular dam – not a sunken pool. But it was very much appreciated none-the-less. Here are Beryl, Geraldine, Beryl's sister Eileen with her son Jonty Sandler, sitting on the wall of the pool with the grape vines and summerhouse in the background – about 1953.

My mother had a **beautiful lounge** in the front room with antique chairs and lamps and china and silver filigree ornaments in a stinkwood corner display cabinet - and also a Sheridan, display cabinet. When my children were small, they loved this room and called it the 'museum' because of all the fascinating things in it and charged the family an entrance fee as they showed us around the treasures. Today I have a chair from that room in my bedroom and I also have many of the china figures and little silver filigree and glass animal miniatures from my mother's collection. That Sheridan display cabinet now enthralls my own grandchildren. And Karen has the corner cabinet the lamp with a china kissing couple as a base and Anthony has a walnut glass fronted bookshelf, all from that home in Kimberley, in our current houses in London.

When we last visited Kimberley, **the family house has a 'historic monument' plaque** on it. It is owned by a socially mobile black family who turned this 'museum' room into a digital cinema with

booming speakers and big screens. Many of the built-in cupboards remained, but the rest of the house and the outbuildings were also unrecognisable. Still, the beautiful Jacaranda trees are yet glorifying the garden.



We often hopped on the train (free tickets as a Railway Dr) to **spend weekends in Johannesburg**, especially when there were visiting artists such as Danny Kaye and Margot Fonteyn or Sadlers' Wells Royal Ballet. We always enjoyed those trips and Beryl and Noel had a chance to meet family and their friends.

This is what the **Big Hole – the Kimberley Mine**, looked like when I was a child, with water far down below the surface. And the Kimberley skyline rather flat at the top.

Yom Tovim in Kimberley

Noel and Beryl had a fulfilling life together in Kimberley, and we children grew up amongst lots of cousins. Beryl's three sisters Hilda, Hannah and Eileen and their husbands Nate Hendler, Jack Frank and Archie Sandler, as well as Noel's brother Julius and his wife Althea all lived in Kimberley with their

children: Owen, Lola and Herbert Hendler, Alma and Brenda Frank, Jonty and Ella Sandler and Philip and David Kretzmar

We always went to **Aunty Hilda for Rosh Hashanah** (Hendler) at 7 Lodge Road (the house originally built for Ernest Oppenheimer and where Harry was born) and my Mother Beryl (Kretzmar) always had Pesach in Carrington Road.

Hilda and Beryl were the eldest of the four daughters of Jacob and Amalie Bergman – who all married and settled in Kimberley for most of their lives.

We would be about 30 people what with Dad's brother Julius (Kretzmar) and family as well. As I remember there was no effort to engage the children (as we try to do today with charts and tubs of animals suffering plagues).

The Seder was rattled though, mainly in Hebrew except for the four questions which I found quite baffling as nobody explained what they were about. No one really remembered the tunes of the songs properly.

The children typically sat at the rickety table in the corner – but nevertheless we stayed up late, played with our cousins, ate matzoh balls and strange sweet offerings like pletzlach and taigelach and hunted for the Afikomen – so it was fun.

Here the family are sitting on the front steps of Kumo, on our last visit there, after the unveiling of Noel's tombstone in 1998. To the right is the national monument medallion.

Theo is in the middle with Gwenda below him and their three sons Justin at the back, Warren left front and Seton right. On the left at the back are Ronnie and me, Geraldine, with Loren beneath us, Ashne is on the back right. (Anthony and Karen were not in the picture though I think they were with us on that trip)



Chapter 8: The Children Grow Up and Leave Kimberley

Beryl was totally supportive of Noel's many professional medical and communal activities. During the second world war she ran the Red Cross Centre for VADs and was active in War relief work. Beryl was a founder member and great enthusiast for the **Union of Jewish Women** which was established in Kimberley in 1939. She was Chairman on several occasions and was given a special certificate for unbroken service for 50 years in the year she died (1989). Many of the younger women in Kimberley mentioned how she nurtured them when they came to Kimberley and joined UJW. She, (right) as well as Helen Brown (left) in the picture below taken in the lounge at Kumo in front of the stinkwood bookshelf, in November 1978, were honoured as Hon Life Vice Presidents of the Kimberley branch.

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dent and chairman of the National Adult Education Division, she has been national chairman of the Community Services Division. She is a member of Women for Peace and Black Cash

Mrs Cohen is a noted cook, with two cookery books to her credit. One of them, which she wrote for the King David School, has been reprinted several times and is now going to be metricated.

MRS JEANETTE COHEN, a past national president of the Union of Jewish Women (centre), with two life presidents of the Kimberley branch of the Union. On the left is Mrs Helen Brown and on the right is Mrs Beryl Kretzmar.

Beryl participated regularly in the Cosy Corner Club, serving tea and cakes to the elderly of Kimberley. (funds provided through the City Council from Alfred Beit 'for the benefit of the people of Kimberley'. She also wrote and updated the history of the Kimberley branch see the story of the branch here. [UJW History of the Kimberley Branch](#). She was active in child welfare and other work.

When each of her grandchildren were born, in South Africa and in London, Beryl was on board to lend a helping hand, running the house, cooking and helping to look after the babies.

She was horrified that we wanted to take our baby daughter on a motor tour of Europe when she was only eight months old. Her solution was to ask to accompany us. This was a glorious holiday together staying in lovely Bed and Breakfasts in France and in the Swiss Valleys – and in a Caravan Park at the World Expo in Lausanne. What she loved was being ‘on the ground’ as her most recent overseas trips, although fabulous and exciting, had been aeroplane hopping from one capital to another.



IN celebration of the 25th anniversary of the State of Israel the Kimberley Branch of the Union of Jewish Women and the Kimberley Women's Zionist League staged an Israeli breakfast yesterday. Speakers after the meal were (from left) Mrs Grace Klein on Yom Kippur in Israel; Mrs Ester Klein, Yom Ha'atzmaut; Mrs Clara Brown, Street Incidents; Mrs Hannah Frank, the Galilee and Golan Heights; Mrs Helen Brown, Life in the Negev; Mrs Beryl Kretzmar, Impressions of Jerusalem — New and Old; and Mrs Althea Kretzmar, Household Shopping in Israel. Breakfast was a mouth-watering presentation of traditional dishes including fresh breads, cream cheeses, hard boiled eggs, olives and salad ingredients accompanied by orange juice, buttermilk, tea and coffee.

Above, in 1973 the UJW and the Zionist League together, held an Israeli Breakfast at Marie Datnow's farm 'Marrick', to celebrate 25 years of the State.

Family holidays continued, but as we became teenagers Theo and I went to Zionist youth Camps, Bnei Zion at Lakeside near Muizenberg (Theo) and Habonim (Geraldine) at Leaches Bay near East London. These were very formative and enjoyable experiences and where I, Geraldine first met my future husband Ronnie Auerbach.

Hannah's daughter Alma told me, 'As you know, Beryl and my Mom were very close sisters. They saw or spoke to each other every single day. Your home was a second home to me. I remember the many times we used to stroll over to your house for afternoon tea - a big event in those days. I remember Beryl as being always very hospitable and an active member of the Jewish community. When our parents went overseas in 1953, Brenda and I stayed with your family where we both went down with chickenpox. I remember how Beryl nursed us both meticulously through this unpleasant illness'. Brenda remembers Beryl as a matriarchal and

authoritative figure. She said 'Somehow, I always saw her as the senior of the four sisters – or perhaps the intellectual one'.

As soon as Theo (1953) and I (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.



Theo became a Doctor in 1960

Theo qualified as a Doctor in 1960 and married Gwenda Cohen, daughter of Selma and Teddy Cohen of Bloemfontein in January 1965. Read his biography here [Kretzmar, Theodore David](#)



They travelled to Edinburgh and London with baby Warren in 1966 for Theo to specialise in general surgery. Spending some wonderful time together with Geraldine and Ronnie and Loren and Anthony in a flat on the same street as the Auerbachs.



After they returned, he practiced in Springs where they raised their three sons before moving to Johannesburg.

After developing MS in his 50s, Theo changed career to work at Discovery Health where in 2019 still working at the age of 82, he was given a **lifetime achievement award** for his services to the company (see picture left).

Geraldine graduated with a BA, also in 1960

My BA specialised in Fine Art and History of Art and Psychology was followed by a Secondary Teachers' Certificate at the University of Cape Town. After teaching for a year at Barnato Park in Johannesburg I married Ronnie Auerbach also a Wits medical graduate in 1960, and we came to London on honeymoon and have been here ever since, Ronnie specialising in ENT. Read Ronnies biography and about our life together here [Auerbach, Ronald](#)



Front row are Theo, Beryl and Noel, Geraldine and Ronnie, 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.

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, the Jewish Music Institute which is now 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 (see above at Buckingham Palace) – and in 2008 and was made an Hon Fellow of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

I am sure Noel and Beryl would be pleased and proud of their son and daughter

Chapter 9:

In Kimberley, Noel and Beryl after the Children Left Home

After Theo and I left home, Beryl threw herself into work with the Union of Jewish Women, learned to play bridge, and continued charity work in the city and to be close to her sisters and immediate family. Noel continued with his medical practice, his farming, his stock exchange excitement.

They bought and developed some small holdings near Kimberley that Beryl named Eldorado and Esperanza. It's tough when your children leave home at 17 – and never really live near you again. I notice this now so keenly as we live very close to our children in London and see our grandchildren on a daily or weekly basis. We did go and spend long holidays staying at Kumo,

when our children were very young, and had extended quality time together with Beryl and Noel and also with Theo and Gwenda.



They also regularly visited Theo and Gwenda in Springs and us in London –

Here is one of the only pictures I know of with Noel and Beryl Kretzmar together with all their children and grandchildren in one picture. We think, judging by the sideburns and the ages of the children that this picture was taken in 1976 in Springs South Africa. Noel was about 75 and Beryl 65.



And below we are in our garden in London in August 1979 and again below in about 1984.



Moving house in Kimberley



Beryl particularly and Noel decided that while they were strong and together they should pack up the big house and move together to a Flat in Lyndale Building Kimberley – where her sister Hannah and Jack already had a big flat.





This they achieved 1980 or 81. The rooms were spacious and light. They had everything they needed in a compact space. And Hannah and Beryl were very close to each other again.

They were very happy there for nearly ten years.

Their precious stinkwood furniture followed them and some of these items like the Kissing Lamp and the Rosenthal Pierrot are now in London.

Chapter 10: After Beryl, Johannesburg 1989 - 1998

After Beryl died suddenly of a pulmonary embolism, probably caused by a heart attack, in July 1989, aged 79, Noel at the age of 90, embarked on to a new chapter in his life.

He finally retired from practice, sold up his flat, his rooms and other buildings in Kimberley and moved to Johannesburg to a lovely sheltered flat in Rosebank that Theo and Gwenda had found for him, to be closer to them. They were still living in Springs, but soon thereafter, they and their three sons all moved to Johannesburg themselves. They all still live there now (2019)

He brought his stinkwood furniture, Timlin paintings and precious objects and arranged them in his new flat in Rosebank Village.

Once in the metropolis, Noel blossomed. This opened up a whole new and exciting chapter in his life. He was very thrilled to be in the metropolis. He had many friends there and the children of family members who had moved to Johannesburg came to visit him. He had the knack of being able to communicate with people of all ages and backgrounds from Presidents to small children



On the left, he is standing in his flat in front of the stinkwood bookcase and display cabinet with the ballerina and jars (that I now have in London).

He was taken out to attend lectures with all his paraphernalia for ease of living and participation – which eventually included walking sticks, wheelchairs, spectacles and

hearing aids of all descriptions. He encouraged friends and relations to write poems for his birthday (instead of buying readymade cards).

He called his first flat 'Tumaro' as he was optimistic and looking forward to the future. (left he is sitting having tea in the garden of his flat). When he moved into a bigger flat along the corridor, he called it 'Shangri La'!

His only sadness was that Beryl was not there to enjoy life in Johannesburg with him.



(They left it too late to make the move together – in fact it never entered their heads.) Julius and Althea had moved to Cape Town, Eileen and Archie had moved to Johannesburg and so had Hilda to be with her children. But they stuck it out in Kimberley together to the end moving from Kumo to Lyndale Flats where Hannah and Jack were also living.

On the right is Noel aged 90 plus, ready to be transported either to (I forget which) a medical meeting or to see his cousin Elliot Kretzmar in the Mayor's Parlour, during his stint a Mayor of Johannesburg, kitted out with his smart shirt, bow tie, proudly showing his bronze medal from the South African Medical Association, his Sennheiser hearing aid earphones and a glass of whisky in his hand! Above left he is enjoying a cup of tea on his terrace in Rosebank, Johannesburg.



Chapter 11: Holidays in Cape Town

In those Johannesburg days, from 1990 – 1998, I used to come out every December with some of our children and first he took us – then we took him to Cape Town for five or six weeks. These were glorious warm and special times in Sea Point and then Muizenberg, and special relationships developed.

Noel always had an exciting theme for these holidays. **One time it was clocks.** Loren mentioned she wanted a grandfather clock. So, he had her put adverts in the Cape Argus for clocks and every day we explored the peninsula, meeting people who had clocks to sell. We learned a lot about clocks and clockmakers. By the middle of the holiday we had a flat full of all kinds of exotic clocks Viennese, Bracket and Grandfather clocks. And by the end of the holiday we had sold nearly all – including the grandfather clock, much to Loren's dismay, and paid for the holiday! I still have one beauty at home to remind me.

Another holiday it was Chaucer. He knew that Loren specialised in Old English and asked her to get a copy of the **Canterbury Tales** (as we used to frequent second-hand bookshops). Each day she would read a couple of



the stories to him which he hugely enjoyed and found very amusing. Then we found co-identally that the Muizenberg Playhouse was putting on a production of the Canterbury Tales. Well we had front row seats and he roared with laughter at pokers being stuck up people's bums and all the other shenanigans.

Here he is with Loren (left) and Karen in December 1997, in the flat we bought on the corner of what was once the Balmoral Hotel.



One year the holiday theme was Tanks: Not the army kind, but ocean containers that carry liquids. He had ordered Six tanks, one for each grandchild which he named for stages in his life, one was Lithuania, one Edinburgh one Kimberley etc. He mused on how his 'descendants' and life story would ply the oceans, backwards and forwards for decades.

He wanted the names printed on the tanks. He was in touch with the promoters of the scheme and arranged to take us to **Cape Town Docks** to meet our tanks. There was a stack of thousands ready for loading on to a transporter ship, but Loren, Karen and I were taken up and down the lines seeking out the tanks with his particular identification numbers and photographing them. He was thrilled with the whole idea of his history plying across the waters. I think the tanks are still doing their stuff and paying dividends!



He loved that Loren collected and sold **vintage clothes**, so all year he advertised in the Star for ballgowns. Sometimes, when women brought them, he asked them to put them on and dance for him! By the time Loren arrived he had a whole selection ready for her to take back to London for her 'shop'. (And many of the Jewish musical groups I established went to Loren and bought these dresses for their performances.)



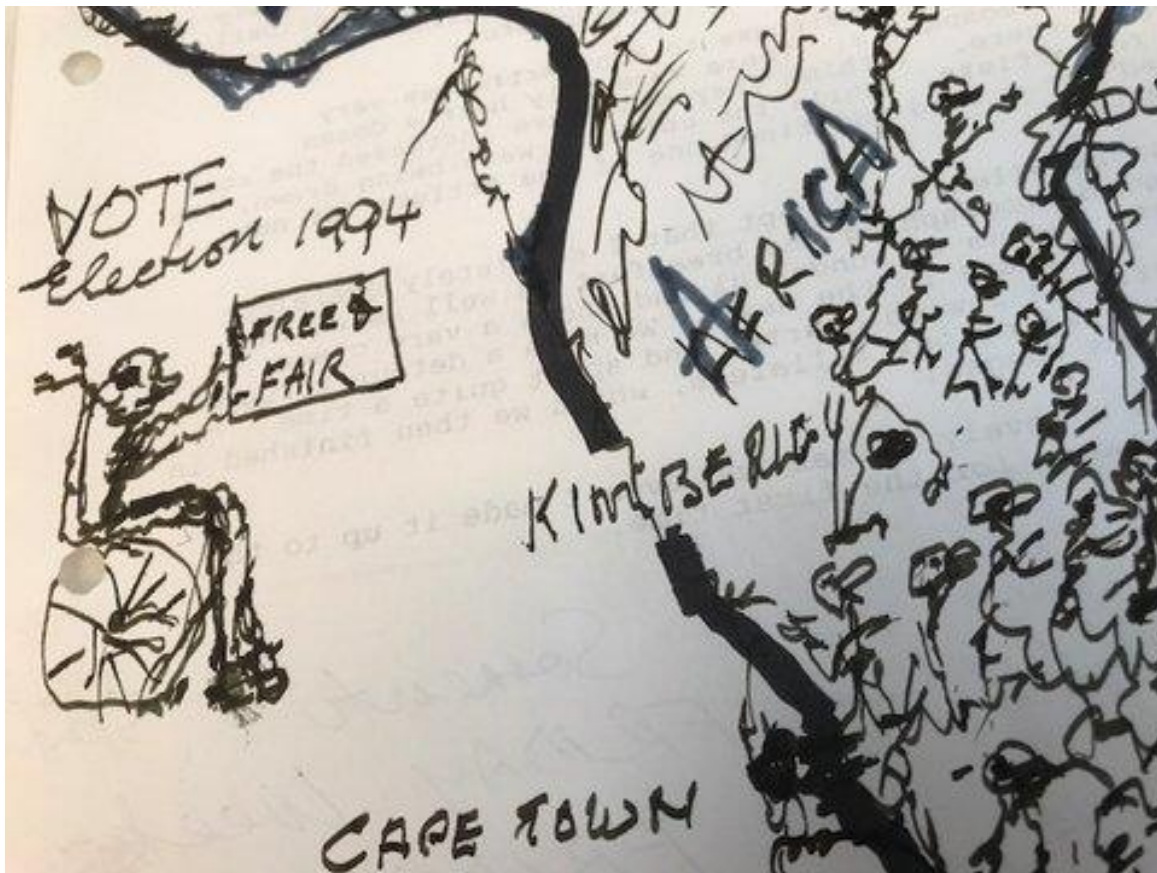
Loren and Noel's relationship was truly inspirational. She was able to engage with his sometimes mad-cap ideas and had huge empathy for his wants and needs and indulged him as nobody else seemed to be able to do. He told her that she needed to find an older man that she could fuss over – and indeed she did.

Her husband to be, **Bert Jansch**, a famous and much-loved guitarist and singer songwriter (whom Noel sadly never met through she had already fallen in love with him) was 20 years older than she was. Loren and Bert married on the Island of Arran on 1 November 1999. They had a truly exceptional relationship being together 24/7 where she was wife, companion and manager to Bert. He would have been so pleased. They were together for nearly 15 happy years (married for

nearly 12) before, utterly sadly, they both died of cancer at the end of 2011. They lie side by side in Highgate Cemetery.



In his last years Noel would draw pictures of himself in his chariot (wheelchair) with walking stick, eye-glasses, hearing aids the lot – but ever eager and rearing to go. Here is part of a picture he sent to Nelson Mandela when the first democratic elections were held.



In his last weeks, Noel wrote a Message to his grandchildren and future generations

This is the message he wrote on 14 January 1998 to his grandchildren as yet unattached and his great grandchildren as yet unborn.



To my children,
grandchildren
and future
generations, which
will flash by in
the years to come.

Life is but a series
of scenarios
which appear on
the horizon and
equally rapidly
disappear into
space.

I have had the
pleasure of
capturing some
such moments
together with you
in these very
precincts. They are
imprinted in my
brain and will be

cherished by me for the rest of my days.

My message to you all is have faith in your God, in yourself and think not for yourself alone. Honour your father and your mother and don't forget your fellow man.

God Bless you all

Papa Noel, Noel Kretzmar, Johannesburg, January 1998

Here are his Grandchildren and Great grandchildren who were yet unborn.



Geraldine and Ronnie's children and grandchildren Ronnies 80th April 2017

Geraldine's 80th party 1 March 2020 (just before lockdown)





Theo and Gwenda's children and grandchildren 2021



Epilogue



Noel seen here with his youngest brother Julius and youngest sister Ashne on one of our Cape Town trips, lived through nearly the whole of the long and turbulent 20th century. He was the perfect **example of one born in poverty and oppression in Lithuania, and who flowered from good** nurturing and free education becoming a professional who contributed to his family, his city and his country. His knowledge

was prodigious, and many people sought his opinions and understanding of things that were happening. His extended family, whenever a decision needed to be made, always said 'What would Noel say?'

The last holiday we had with him in Cape Town summer 1997/8, I wanted to 'interview' him on my video camera for his take on how he saw the development over his time on earth of things like 'Jews', 'Sex', 'Gold' etc. he would have had such an amazing perspective on all this. But sadly we never managed to do this.

Everyone who was acquainted with him retains an indelible impression of a man of enormous presence, charm and wit; of compassion and empathy, profound knowledge, prodigious memory and vigorous intellect. He loved medicine, he loved his family and he loved and embraced LIFE. His memory is a great inspiration to us all.

Final word from: Theo

I want to share the final chapter of this remarkable life. When Noel came to Johannesburg, we had many wonderful "chats". Among them was, in his words, I have made my peace in heaven and earth. When the time comes. I am ready and want to go quietly and with dignity.

The time came at about midday and Gwenda and I were in the car on the way home from the coast. When we arrived at the flat, he woke up and spoke to Gwenda and I briefly gave us a kiss then drifted away. Later during the night Geraldine phoned. I took the phone to him. Once more he woke up, spoke to Geraldine, then after that he drifted back and passed away, exactly as he wished to go. I think this was a wonderful ending to a special life. Theo



Here are Loren and I after his unveiling at the Kimberley cemetery in December 1998 where he and Beryl lie side by side, in Kimberley once more.

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**Family responses Here are some family responses to my previous short bio about Great Grand-Papa and Grand-Uncle Noel with the message he wrote for his grandchildren and future generations (received in January 2019)**

**From:** David Friedman

Dear Geraldine

I read with much interest the beautiful story you put together and it brought back a flood of memories.

I guess I am one of the ever-reducing number of people that can still refer to Uncle Noel and not Grand Uncle Noel. He brought me into the world over 83 years ago at 10 Ellesmere Road Kimberly and I still remember very clearly that as a young child I suffered very badly from bronchitis but Uncle Noel always made me better. He has always been my model of what a doctor should be – calm, reassuring with a quiet confidence in all that he did. Although we were the living in Bloemfontein I remember coming back to Kimberly as I required a tonsillectomy as there was no way that anybody other than Uncle Noel was going to do it. He duly did so at the Kimberly Hospital and the following day I came down with scarlet fever - but Uncle Noel got me ever that as well. Many, many years later when living in Durban our eldest son was diagnosed with Perthes disease. Noel and Beryl happened to be visiting Durban at the time. Obviously I was beside myself with the thought that Richard would have to spend about 2 years in leg irons. Noel simply said to me have him have a full body X-ray to confirm the diagnosis was correct and that it was not something more serious such as TB of the bones and if the diagnosis is confirmed just congratulate yourself - Perthes will be cured easily anything else will not. And as usual he was correct. Richard today is 58 and has never had a moments problem with his hip.

Love, David

**From:** Mark & Mandi Steinberg

**Sent:** 26 January 2019 20:33

**Subject:** Re: Great Grand Uncle Noel

Hi Geraldine

Thank you so much for sharing this. It was really interesting and filled in a lot of gaps. I remember in my early 20s going to visit Uncle Noel for some investment advice as I was thinking of buying some shares and he smiled and said that I should buy some gold coins instead as gold is something physical that I could hold in my hands. I bought a couple of Kruger rands, and sold them to fund my first trip to Israel which started a new chapter in my life.

I will share his message with my kids. Love to all, Mark

**From:** Jennifer Hendler

**Subject:** Re: Great Grand Uncle Noel

Thank you so much for these wonderful memories of Great Grand Uncle Noel which as a title alone is perfect and we enjoyed reading every word 🙌🙌❤️👍

Love, Jen and Herbert.

**From:** Ingrid Steinberg

**Subject:** Re: Great Grand Uncle Noel

Hi Geraldine, What a beautiful memorial to Uncle Noel. I have such fond memories of him! I am printing it out as we speak and plan to share it with the boys and keep it.

Happy New Year! Love, Ingrid

**From:** Sybil Kretzmer (pictured with Noel)

**Subject:** Re: Great Grand Uncle Noel



Dear Geraldine,

What a wonderful history you have written and shared with us. I have just read it to Herbie.

I feel honoured and blessed to have known your wonderful, special, amazing father. I will take his memory and advice to my own grave. Thank you.

XXXSybil

**From:** Vanessa Kretzmar **Cc:** seton

**Subject:** RE: Great Grandpa Noel

Hi Geraldine

Thank you so much for putting this together for all of us to read, and to learn more about Noel.

Lots of Love, Seton, Vanessa, Caitlyn and Ethan

**Jonty Sandler** wrote to Noel on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday 3.08.89 (a few weeks after Beryl's passing).

Dear Uncle Noel

Flaxen and resolute, you endure  
Life's thrusts and parries  
Your Wisdom layered 90-fold with experience ensure  
A wondrous, weighted clarion clear perspective of ebb and flow.  
Your honoured past and joyful marriage need permeate your grieving soul and spirit.  
And still find meaning in existence.  
Even though it may all be at a distance.  
In a quiet repose, with Blissful memories of Auntie Beryl.  
Reside in peaceful equanimity  
Knowing that sorrow is for now  
And will not last  
And love will not pass  
For her love will ever be  
With thee. – Trite but True  
Your eternal optimism in life both here and beyond  
Has so many filled with confidence and inspiration  
And I for one am indebted too  
And thank you for all your gracious kindness shown to me  
And all my family  
In my physical absence  
Accept my heartfelt felicitations  
And may this day be a respectful celebration  
As Always, Jonty

## **Birzh Memorial 2019**

In 2019 descendants of families of the Birzh victims under the leadership of Able and Glenda Levitt of Cape Town, created, funded and unveiled a marvellous memorial in the forest. They worked with were encouraged by the local 'Tolerance Centre' of Lithuanians who are educating their young about what happened then.

You can read about the unveiling of the memorial here

<https://www.jewishrenaissance.org.uk/blog/birzai-holocaust-memorial>

and <https://www.sajbd.org/media/the-birzai-birzh-memorial-project-lithuania>

My cousin Philip Kretzmar reported: The trip was more than just unveiling the memorial. They visited Vilna and Kovno, as well as a school and had activities with some in the community.

There were activities to promote awareness of the Jewish community that had been there, and to promote tolerance, including the opening of a tolerance centre.

Apparently, there are now about 135 in Lithuania, up from about 10 a few years ago - evidence of a concerted effort to promote awareness and tolerance. On the actual day, they planted trees for the righteous gentiles, everyone put on a yellow star, and then everyone walked to the clearing in the forest where the Jews were murdered. Schoolchildren carried yellow flowers, which they put in a Star of David. The local school choir sang a couple of Hebrew songs.

Pictures of this day have been put together as a collage, to the sound of one of the songs the children's choir sang, Ana Bekoach. (On a personal note - we do a folk dance to Ana Bekoach - it is an ancient mystical prayer which contains all of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the



belief is supposed to be that if the prayer is said with enough kavanah (feeling), the messiah will come.)

By chance, I also managed to go to a talk last Saturday night by a woman who went on the trip. She is doing a write-up, which will be posted in the next while. It was interesting. Please feel free to pass on and share with your kids, or whomever. Geraldine and Johnny - you may possibly already have this through

other sources?

**On 15 June 2019, Danielle Lockwood, daughter of Herbert Kretzmer (son of Willy) wrote to me from Birzh: 'Geraldine**

Last night we held the first Shabbat service in Birzai since 1941. There were 50 of us and 50 Lithuanians who are in some way involved in the project. The Israeli Ambassador was here, the Mayor and other local dignitaries. It was very moving and poignant. We have been welcomed by the community – well, by many. We have been speaking to school children and they have been telling us about their work in Tolerance centres etc, and we gave many presentations.

With love

Danielle x'

You can read more about Birzh here [https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/birzai/Birzh\\_1.html](https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/birzai/Birzh_1.html)

There is a video too One of the travellers wrote: Home now two weeks after a trip to Lithuania where I accompanied a group of special people who, for four years, put together an amazing project in remembrance of family members and others, killed in cold blood in 1941 when antisemitism raged after the Nazi occupation. An important purpose of the trip was to connect to the local people of the town Birzai some 262 kms from the capital Vilna.

Tolerance, discussion and sharing were top on the list of priorities for the project. Natalie Wheeler and her daughter put this video together of the ceremony when we walked from the town over the bridge to the forest where 2400 Jews were killed.

We walked together with the local people, pupils, students and several "righteous saviours" of Jews during the period. The choir sang in Hebrew. The stainless steel memorial plaque, designed by architect, Joseph Rabie ex Cape Town is really beautiful- stars chiselled out, in between the names of those killed.

Glenda and Abel Levitt ex Cape Town and now residing in Israel, were the dynamic force behind



this project, together with the generous donations received from Advocate Benny Rabinowitz and friends from Cape Town, without whose support it all could not have happened

Sharing this with you all.

<https://youtu.be/tma3iITQ0aU>

## The Morris Family Tree

My father's mother was Taube Moras Morris

From our second cousin on her side Phyllis Cohen we have a family tree that shows some of the family on her side. Highlighted are ones in our tree.

1. Zalman Rubens – wife name unknown (1) (6 children)
  - a. Yehuda – married Esther Shore (2)
    - i. Mendel – married Reisel (3)
      1. Braine (4)
      2. Levin (4)

- ii. Israel – married Hannah (3)
  - 1. Julius – married Benty Shapiro (moved to Milwaukee) (4)
  - 2. Paul (4)
  - 3. Hayme – married Teddy (moved to Skokie, Ill.) (4)
  - 4. Zelda – married Norman (4)
- iii. Riva – married David J. Schulman (3)
  - 1. Jack Shulman – married Marcella Grace Soslow (moved to NYC) (4)
    - a. Walter – married Irene (moved to Glen Cove, Long Island) (5)
    - b. Cynthia – married Rober Schweiger (moved to Port St. Lucie, Fla) (5) (maybe we met in New York in 1948?)
  - 2. Morris – married Nettie (4)
  - 3. Harry – married Sophie Bregman (4)
  - 4. Sol – married Annette (4)
  - 5. Anne – married David Jaffe (4)
  - 6. Doris – married Lester Golden (4)
- iv. Eli Rubens – married Dolly Cohen from Great Britain moved to Cardiff Wales (3)
  - 1. Harold Rubens (moved to South Africa) (4)  
Pianist came on trip to SA and got job as professor of piano Cape Town University
  - 2. Beryl Rubens (4)
  - 3. Bernice Rubens–married Rudy (moved to London) (4) ‘Welsh’ Author first woman to win Booker Prize (right)
  - 4. Cyril Rubens– married Janet (moved to London) (4) played violin in LSO
- v. Luba – married Moshe Shindelman (3)
  - 1. Braine - married Naum Granowski (4)
  - 2. Esther – married Ysssai Lazowski (4)
  - 3. Judel (4)
- vi. Berl – married Rochel Moskin (3)
  - 1. Esther – married Sasha Teitelbaum (4)
  - 2. Zena – married Volodia Perloff (4)
- vii. Tillie (3)
- viii. Aaron (3)
- b. Sheine – married Chaim Horowitz (Gurevitz) (2)
  - i. Shmuel – married Genendel (moved to Los Angeles) (3)
  - ii. Tillie – married Harry Bankoff ( moved to Los Angeles) (3)
  - iii. Libby - married Smith ( moved to San Diego) (3)
- c. Asnith - married Levine (2)
  - i. Jack – married Minnie (3)
  - ii. Sara – married Louis Eisner (3)
  - iii. Tillie – married Hyman Barack (3)
  - iv. Shaye – married Etty (to Africa) (3)
  - v. William – married Manya (3)
- d. Chaya – married Kosseff (twin of Shoreh) (2)





- i. Abe (3)
  - ii. Rella – married Itze Padowitz (to Johannesburg, S. Africa) (3) We Knew them in Johannesburg Furriers and clothes importers
  - iii. Zoreck (3)
  - iv. Another child (to Africa) (3)
- e. Shoreh (Sara) – married Yankelson (twin of Chaya) (2)
  - i. Tanya (Taibe) – married Aaron Heled (to Israel, 10 Hashmonaim St./Tel Aviv) (3)
  - ii. Berel (3)
    - 1. Mussie – married Yaakov Kaputulnick (4)
      - a. Aaron (5)
      - b. Son (5)
      - c. Daughter (5)
  - iii. David (3)
    - 1. 3 children (4)
- f. Neche (d.1912) – married David Getzel Morris (d. 1910) (2) (5 children) Simberig
  - i. Moshe (Maishe) - married Sarah Kretzmer – sister to Tobias Kretzmar (1866) (3)
    - 1. Son (1884 – death WWI)(4)
    - 2. Taube (1882-1982) (moved to NYC) – married Schulman (4)
      - a. Jack Schulman –married Marcella (5)
        - i. Walter (6)
  - ii. Samuel (1870-1934) – married Rachel (3)
    - 1. Ida (death in Holocaust?) (4)
    - 2. Tillie (death in Holocaust?) (4)
  - iii. Taube (1873-1929) – married Tobias Kretzmar (1867-1928) (to S. Africa 1899/1903)(3) My grandmother that I never knew
    - 1. David (1893-1924) (4) Died of TB aged 31
    - 2. Leah (1895) – married Harry Levy (4)
      - a. Thelma (1933) – married Alec Cohen (5)
        - i. Gary (6)
        - ii. Howard (6)
        - iii. Meryl (6)
        - iv. Wendy (6) – married Gavin Miller
          - 1. Carli (7)
          - 2. Jodie (7)
    - 3. Freda (1897) – married Harry Frank (4)
      - a. Taubene (1933) – married Abe Hoppenstein (1931 – 2019) Consul General from South Africa – moved to US in 1976 - DC/ NYC/Connecticut/retired to Florida (5)
        - i. Shelley (1956)(6) – married Jonathan Schlosberg (1953)
          - 1. Tammy (1986) (7)
          - 2. Adam (1988) (7)
          - 3. Gaby (1991) (7)
        - ii. Joel (1959) – married Monica (1965) (6)
          - 1. Simone (1994) (7)
          - 2. Daniella (1995) (7)

- 3. Matthew (1998) (7)
    - 4. Joshua (2004) (7)
  - iii. Saul (1964) – married Diane (1964) (6)
    - 1. Robert (1996) (7)
    - 2. Evan (1998) (7)
    - 3. Bradley (2002) (7)
  - iv. Deborah (1966) – married Brian Zucker (1966) (6)
    - 1. Jordan (1998) (7)
    - 2. Elizabeth (1998) (7)
- 4. Noel (1899-1998) – married Beryl Bergman (1909-1989) (4)
  - a. Theodore (1936) – married Gwenda Cohen (1942) (5)
    - i. Warren (1966) (6) – Natalie Christophanies
      - 1. Gabriella (2006) Mika (2008) (7)
    - ii. Justin (1971) (6) married Debbi Rosen children Jonah and Aaliyah (7)
    - iii. Seton (1977) (6) - married Vanessa Children Caitlyn and Ethan
  - b. Geraldine (1940) – married Ronald Auerbach (moved to London England) (5)
    - i. Loren (1963-2011) (6) – married Bert Jansch
    - ii. Anthony (1966) (6) Marlene Haring, Children Lenz (2010) Minz 2015 (7)
    - iii. Karen (1969) (6) m Chris Kidson 2005 Daisy 2007 Bella 2009 (7)
- 5. Arnold (1905-1990) – married Rita Tauchess (4)
  - a. Alan (5)
- 6. Julius (1907-1995) – married Althea Katz (1924)(4)
  - a. Philip (1952) –married Kaarina Baker (1961) - moved to Ottawa (5)
    - i. Philip (1995) (6)
    - ii. Hannah (1997) (6)
    - iii. Theodore (1999) (6)
  - b. David (1953) – married Benice Datnow/Leigh Robinson (5)
    - i. Janna (1980) (6)
    - ii. Samantha (1982) (6)
    - iii. Matthew (2008) (6)
- 7. Ashne (1913-2007) – married Harold Shapiro (4)
  - a. Etta (1949) – married Michael Perr (1930)(5)
    - i. Shawn (6)
    - ii. Tracey (1957) (6)
  - b. Tevis (1953) – married Michelle Benson (5)
    - i. Joshua Shapiro (1984) (6)
    - ii. Gideon Shapiro (1987) (6)