

INTERVIEW INDEX (TRANSCRIPT): **Bernard Lerer**

*Families / people*

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## *Themes / topics*

(p.1)

- Family origins
  - Both parents came from Lithuania: father by himself, to join his brother who was living and working in Durbanville (1920s), and mother with her whole family (on one of the last boats to leave before the war)
  - Father worked various jobs; never had formal schooling
    - While working as a barkeeper of a hotel, he taught the (Jewish) owner's kids Hebrew in the bar
    - (p.2) Through working in the hotel and a general store, he learned English and arithmetic
  - Father volunteered for the South African Army when the war started
    - Rose to the level of corporal, then sergeant...was the commander of an armoured car in the western desert
    - Did several acts of valour, received a military medal
    - Used ex-serviceman privileges to gain a bottle-store license; became a part-owner of the Tiervlei Bottle Store
    - Also went into the 'skin-buying' business...as a middleman between farmers and The Wool Growers Association
  - Parents met between 1944-1948; set up house in Parow [first Scott Street, later moved to Hopkins Street]

(p.3)

- Mother's origins
  - One of 7 children
  - Had been to school in Lithuania, came to Johannesburg soon after...learnt English quickly, began to work as a typist
  - Worked in the South African Zionist Federation
- Parow
  - Parents moved there for the flourishing Jewish community?
  - Deeply connected to the shul
    - Kept kosher at home, rarely ate outside of the house
- Father's foray into building (building and selling houses/flats)
  - Benrose Court in Parow, near where Rabbi Lipshitz lived, is named after the kids

(p.4)

- School:
  - o Parow Preparatory
  - o Parow North; later Herzlia (going to Jewish day school was important to his parents)
    - Had desperately wanted to go to SACS...parents said no
- Father's engagement with the shul
  - o Very connected; pillar of the minyan [they installed a telephone in the shul just to call people to come make up a minyan]
  - o Built the cheder [which later became the Parow Library for a while]; Shalia Freedberg donated a lot of the money for the construction
- (p.5) Religiosity in Parow: people weren't very observant, but were very attached to the shul & Jewish community
  - o Shabbat; high holidays
- Rabbi Lipshitz
  - o Imparted a great level of knowledge
  - o Was an angry person (due to his personal circumstances?)
  - o (p.6) Some in the community *did* have a warmer connection with him
- Older generation's education
  - o Mr Lerer was deeply immersed in Yiddish
- Parents' friendship with the Freedberg's
  - o Visited each other even after the Freedberg's moved to Claremont
  - o (p.7) Friendship began when they were neighbours on Hopkins Street
- Jewish contemporaries
  - o David & Jonathan Freedberg, Rodney Reznick, late Ivan Cohen...
    - Ivan Cohen's early life (head boy, promising future...), tragic accident
  - o (p.8) Cape Town "Royalty" = Herzlia head boy; Parow produced two
- Social distinctions in Parow
  - o Money played a role (more than education) – the people that remained "stayed because they didn't have enough money to go elsewhere"

(p.9)

- Social distinctions (cont.)
  - o Doctors were "aristocracy"...Lerer kids were encouraged to do medicine
- Father's involvement with the shul (cont.)

- (p.10) Bar mitzvah
  - Preparations with Rabbi Lipshitz
  - Reception in the Parow Civic Centre; catered by the Emdin Brothers
- (p.11) Relationship with non-Jewish community in Parow
  - Good relations
- Parents weren't particularly political
  - After losing a lot of family in the Holocaust, Mr Lerer did not want anything to do with politics
  - Staunch Zionists
    - (p.12) Settled in Jerusalem
- Relationship with people of colour in Parow
  - Had servants in the house (domestic workers, gardeners, drivers)
  - Parents were "decent" in their attitude, did not exploit people of colour
    - It was a "relief" to leave SA's complex politics behind in the 1970s
- Med-school 50 year reunion; Marion Jacobs

(p.13)

- Influence of Parow upbringing on later life?
  - Cultivate ambition, a desire to achieve...to "get out"
  - Brother's latest company is named "Parow Enthio Biotechnology" – Parow lives on...
    - (p.14) Many contemporaries from Parow became very successful
- [request for any further info, documents, or photographs]
- Rose's visit to Lithuania to trace family history
  - Met people who knew their father...
    - But he wanted nothing to do with it – he was quite bitter about the war and the Holocaust
    - (p.15) Volunteering for the war...