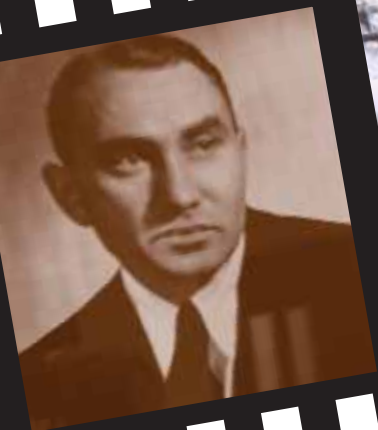


# TRIBUTE

*to Temple Israel*

MOTHER SYNAGOGUE OF THE  
SOUTH AFRICAN PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT



*Celebrating 70 years!*

# PAYING tribute

The beginnings of the Progressive\* movement in South Africa has been disputed numerous times by various people, over the years. Since I started my research for this brochure, I've discovered that not even the leaders of the movement in the 50s were sure about when the movement started.

I read through the Silver Jubilee commemorative issue (25 years), which was combined with the Rosh Hashana Annual of 1958, and the Golden Jubilee commemorative issue, dated 1983. According to them, the birth of Progressive Judaism in this country was in 1933, when Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler came to Johannesburg... or so I thought...

Then I came across another Golden Jubilee commemorative issue from 1981, showing that Progressive Judaism started in 1931... When looking a little closer however, I discovered that the former was the 50th anniversary of the United Progressive Jewish Congregation of Johannesburg (UPJC), while the latter was that of the Southern African Union for Progressive Judaism (SAUPJ).

But then again, if Johannesburg was the only place that Progressive Judaism existed at the time, then surely the UPJC and the SAUPJ were the same? So I read some more... and found that neither of these Unions existed in the 1930s anyway. The predecessor and founding organisation was called the South African Jewish Religious Union for Liberal\* Judaism, which was established in 1931 by Jerry Idelson, Oscar Caplan, Victor Brasch and a few others. Rabbi Weiler established the Johannesburg Jewish Reform Congregation soon after his arrival in 1933.

According to an article written by Rabbi Walter Blumenthal (the first South African to be ordained as a Progressive Rabbi) in the 1981 issue, the Jewish Religious Union brought about the Johannesburg Jewish Reform Congregation, to which it gave way and with which it melded. "In turn, the congregation motivated the formation of a body, which is our present [1981] Southern African Union for Progressive Judaism. [So] 1981 is undoubtedly our Golden Jubilee year as an organised, functioning movement in this sub-continent."

Rabbi Weiler was undisputedly the first Progressive Jewish Rabbi to set foot on South African soil, and therefore the first founding Rabbi. According to the late Oscar Caplan however, Jerry Idelson was instrumental in bringing Progressive Judaism to the country through his brother, Professor Abraham Zvi Idelsohn in 1929, and should therefore be considered its true founder. (See article on page 11.)

I met with Ruby Caplan, Oscar's wife, who is 98 this year, and Benny Stalson who is 87. I wanted to chat to them and to see what they could dig out for me about the early days... Well, with all the information they gave me, it would take a book to cover everything, especially the disputes about the movement's beginnings – and believe me, of all the books I'd like to write, this one is now high on the list. In fact, perhaps there's even a screenplay in it...

But whatever the case may be regarding the movement, one thing is certain and undeniable... Temple Israel IS 70 years old this



year! Although the site was purchased in 1933, building was completed in 1936, and the roof-wetting and inaugural service took place on Sunday 23 August that year.

This weekend, the focus is on celebrating Temple Israel's birth and its position as the Mother Synagogue of Progressive Judaism. We will also honour Benny Stalson, a man who has dedicated the past 65 years to the movement, to Temple Israel, and to espousing the beliefs, values and teachings of our modern interpretation of Judaism.

We'd also like to thank Reeva Forman, who has devoted herself to the struggle to keep Temple Israel open for the few Jews left in Hillbrow, and who supports the people and the regeneration of the area surrounding the synagogue.

In *The Star* on December 28, 1933, an article appeared entitled "Liberal synagogue site purchased: An important step". The following words take us back to a time filled with hope for the future of Progressive Judaism.

"A most important step forward has been taken by the Johannesburg Jewish Reform Congregation... It has purchased a site for the erection of a Liberal Jewish Synagogue in Johannesburg, the first in South Africa... This achievement puts Reform Judaism in this city on a permanent basis, and undoubtedly makes it a force to be reckoned with in the affairs and progress of local Jewry."

In 1953, within 20 years of Temple Israel being built, Progressive synagogues numbered around 13, and by 1972, about 20 synagogues had been established throughout the country, although unfortunately, some had closed.

We may not be as widespread as we were 50 or even 30 years ago, but we are definitely "in this city [and in this country] on a permanent basis".

Finally, this is about the future of Temple Israel as a synagogue, as a heritage site and as an essential part of the Progressive Jewish movement. This synagogue is a reminder not only of where we've been, but also of where we're headed.

L'CHAIM!

*Darryl Egnal*

*"Progressive, Reform and Liberal have always been used interchangeably to describe our form of Judaism. Today, the terms "Progressive" or "Progressive Reform" are used more often. For the purposes of continuity, I will use "Progressive" Judaism throughout this brochure, except where quotes appear.*

Editorial & design of *Tribute to Temple Israel* anniversary brochure

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# MESSAGES and memories...



Ms. Reeva Forman, Chairman  
Temple Israel of Hillbrow  
Paul Nel and Claim Streets  
Johannesburg, South Africa

Dear Reeva,

It is with great admiration and personal pleasure that we send you these words of congratulations as the SAUPJ celebrates the 70th Anniversary of Temple Israel of Hillbrow, Johannesburg. This milestone carries with it great meaning for us at the World Union for Progressive Judaism, as we reflect back on the noble history of the congregation and Progressive Judaism in general in South Africa.

When Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler was sent to Johannesburg by the World Union back in 1933 to establish Progressive Judaism in Southern Africa, few then would have dared to dream of the accomplishments which he and our movement would achieve over the following decades. The construction of Temple Israel in Hillbrow in 1936 paved the way for remarkable success and expansion of our movement. So many owe their introduction to Progressive Judaism to this very Temple and to its towering Rabbinic leader, Moses Chaim.

The legacy of Temple Israel has been carried on by many dedicated and committed souls over the years. We salute Benny Stalson, indomitable teacher, lay reader and Chazan of the congregation for his decades of loyal service to the congregation. And to you, dear Reeva, we extend our sincere congratulations and pride for your undying loyalty to the past, present and future of Temple Israel. You are an inspiration to us all and may your energy and commitment remain boundless.

And so, on behalf of our World Union professional and lay leadership, Rabbi Uri Regev, President, Steve Bauman Chair, and Leslie Bergman, Senior Chair, it is our great honor to extend our World Union blessing to all involved in this most significant and joyous occasion.

May the Holy One, blessed be he, continue to shine down on and be gracious to all those who toil for the sake of the Jewish People in South Africa. And may the legacy of Temple Israel continue to inspire and shape the efforts of the generations yet to come.

So may it be His will,

Amen

Rabbi Uri Regev  
President

Rabbi Joel Oseran  
Vice President, International Development



Rabbi Uri Regev



Rabbi Joel Oseran



# MESSAGES and memories...



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Dear Reeva

Temple Israel was built in 1936 just three years after Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler came to South Africa. This was quite an achievement for the time and shows the faith that our founders had in our movement. Rabbi Weiler was an outstanding leader and, like the building of Temple Israel, gave the movement a solid foundation.

On behalf of the SAUPJ, I would like to congratulate you as chairman of Temple Israel and your committee for all the hard work you put into this shul. You have had a lot of adversity to cope with and many have recommended that you shut the doors, not only due to the area you are situated in, but also the dwindling numbers. Due to your tenacity and foresight, you have kept the Mother Synagogue going. The amount of indigent people and those living on hard times was not taken into account when making these recommendations. This is the only shul in the area catering for such, and for this we thank you. When I see what you have done not only for these people, but also the feeding schemes and the co-operation with Ma-Tikkun Africa, it warms my heart.

What a wonderful achievement not only for Temple Israel, the Mother Synagogue, but also for the entire Progressive movement in this country. This is a proud moment in our history; let us all reflect on the past 70 years and use this moment to build on the next 70. Let us use this opportunity to show how proudly we stand today as a movement and to grow to greater heights.

It is a great privilege to welcome the dignitaries who will be sharing this momentous celebration with us. I am honoured to welcome Rabbi Abraham Soetendorp, President of the European World Union for Progressive Judaism and his wife, Sira, to South Africa for this 70<sup>th</sup> celebration of Temple Israel. In these troubled times, one of the most significant areas in the future of all religions is interfaith dialogue and it is an honour to have Rabbi Soetendorp, a leader in this field, here to impart his knowledge to us.

Many more honours will be bestowed rightfully at this celebration, from the first Bar Mitzvah to be held at Temple Israel - that of Dr Willie Grusiner - to Benny Stalson for the many years of dedication and loyal service to Temple Israel that he and his wife May have given.

On behalf of the SAUPJ and its management, I would like to wish you all a hearty *Maze/lov* on this wonderful achievement. To the 70<sup>th</sup> committee under the chairmanship of Monica Solomon, I would like to thank you all for putting this wonderful event together.

Thank you all,

Steve Lurie  
Chairman, SAUPJ

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Steve Lurie (National Chair)

Greg Lyons (Regional Chair) Stanley Lipschitz (Regional Chair) Jeff Carel (Treasurer) Rabbi H. Avidan (Chair-SAAPR)  
Monica Solomon (President-SAUTS) Arden Finn (Roah Netzar) Steve Cohn (Mentor)



Steve Lurie

Photo: Grant Dixon

# MESSAGES and memories...

## Temple Israel celebrations

I would like to send greetings to all our membership of the SAUPJ nationally on this historic occasion of our Mother synagogue in South Africa.

Temple Israel holds many fond memories for my family and myself, as my late paternal grandfather was one of the founders of the congregation, and naturally, Temple Israel is from whence we all arrived into the movement.

My late father, Arthur Abrahams, was on the committee, but then branched off into the educational side of the temple. First he became chairman of the Hebrew School followed by chairman of the school board of all the temples at a later date.

I was naturally sent to the Hebrew school to learn for my Bar Mitzvah under the strict attention of a Mr Locketz, and had my Bar Mitzvah under the ever watchful eye of the late Rabbi Weiler, a man larger than life at that time and proudly our founding Rabbi. Simultaneously, the new Temple Shalom was nearing completion and my Bar Mitzvah party was the first function in the new building.

I remember how often Rabbi Weiler visited our home in Forest Town and how he and my father spent many extremely important hours in discussion over shul matters and needed many glasses of scotch together to conclude the meeting.

My career in the SAUPJ progressed onwards for 53 years until three years ago, when I retired after being president of the SAUPJ, and my active duties within the movement came to an end. – *Stan Abrahams*



## Memories of Temple Israel

I lived with my parents, Alec and Ada Egnal, and my sister Barbara, in Parktown North, about 1200 metres from the bus and tram terminus. It was a real schlep to get to Temple Israel for cheder on a Shabbat morning, and a rush to be there on time. Mid-week was easier, as junior school was on the same bus route as the shul, and high school was within walking distance.

Interested and dedicated teachers taught us our Bar Mitzvah lessons, Hebrew and Judaism. Benny Stalson was one teacher whom I remember with fondness – not only at Temple Israel, but also at Alan Isaacs Camp in Margate. He was in charge of the camp. I still see him occasionally.

Rabbi Isaac Richards, who still lives in Durban, and whom I have also seen quite often over the years, taught me my Bar Mitzvah portion. He would never have believed then that the naughty boy he knew would eventually become chairman of Bet David for over eight years.

Rabbi Moses Weiler was responsible for the whole cheder, and his signature, as well as Rabbi Richards' and Benny Stalson's, are on my Bar Mitzvah certificate.

Rabbi Weiler was a strict disciplinarian and students who did not pay attention to his sermon, or were caught talking during the shul service were summarily asked to leave. This caused them huge embarrassment, as the shul in those days was well attended on Shabbat mornings.

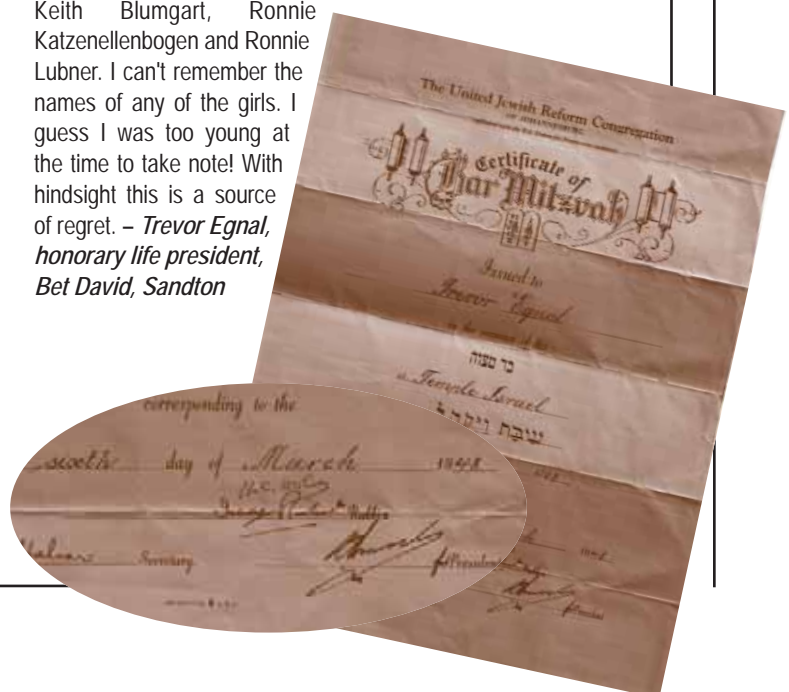
Attending these services was compulsory, but occasionally we managed to hide from the teachers after lessons – during the break before the service, which began at 11.30 am. We would slip away

and catch a bus to town. We'd then go to the Plaza "bioscope" to see the serial-trailers and a Western.

After my Bar Mitzvah, I joined a Jewish "scout" movement at Temple Israel. I don't recall its name. It was a mixed group of boys and girls, and was great fun. Enthusiasm for these activities led to greater enthusiasm for the annual Alan Isaacs Camp in Margate.

Wally Blumenthal (later Rabbi Walter Blumenthal of Temple Shalom) was a few years older than I was, and at the age of 16, he was already conducting the shul services at camp. He was also studying Torah. It was a given that he would go on to become a Rabbi.

I recall a few of my fellow students such as Eddie Broomberg, Keith Blumgart, Ronnie Katzenellenbogen and Ronnie Lubner. I can't remember the names of any of the girls. I guess I was too young at the time to take note! With hindsight this is a source of regret. – *Trevor Egnal, honorary life president, Bet David, Sandton*



## Temple Israel's early days

In November 1937, my parents and I arrived in South Africa from Germany – I was eight years old. We lived in a house in Paul Nel Street opposite Temple Israel for most of my childhood, and became members of the temple in 1938.

I remember Rabbi Weiler well as he taught Judaism while Benny Stalson taught us Hebrew. There were a large number of children attending the Hebrew School and many lasting friendships were formed.

In those days, Temple Israel was only at its beginnings and I remember Rabbi Weiler coming to our house to borrow damask table cloths, silver candlesticks and a Kiddush cup when a function took place at the temple.

Transport was occasionally arranged for fun-filled picnics, and in July, many children would go by train to the Alan Isaacs Camp. This was first in tents at Sunnybrae and later in huts in Margate. In the 50s and 60s, I went a few times as camp nurse and we often had up to 150 campers – no holiday for me!

A children's choir was formed and used to sing on Saturday mornings with an adult soloist and at the special children's services on the High Holy Days. Jerry Idelson, followed by Edie Steafel, trained the choir and played the organ.

B'not Mitzvah were held in groups and I was in the third group of girls ever to have a Bat Mitzvah and that was in 1943. The outcry by the Orthodox community was tremendous – until a few years later when they followed suit!

There were no microphones, and Rabbi Weiler stood at the back of the temple teaching us how to project our voices when reading from the Bimah. We had to wear white dresses, have something on our heads, and of course wear white gloves! In my group, there about five girls and we each read a special prayer and a bit from the Siddur. This being during the war, my father, who was in the army, could not be with us. I don't remember a special Kiddush, just a few friends coming to our house after the service.

When we were teenagers, there were many get-togethers, and several dances were held in the hall. A few years later, Bet Emunah came into being to encourage teenagers to continue with their Hebrew studies.

I held the mistaken belief that a Rabbi stayed with his congregation forever and was quite shocked when Rabbi Weiler emigrated to Israel. I actually missed his calling me 'Heinemann' (my maiden name), which he pronounced in the German way, and which used to embarrass me quite a bit as a child. After that, many Rabbis came and went. And I was closest to Rabbi Arthur Super and then Rabbi Michael Standfield.

Rabbi Walter Blumenthal conducted Ivor's and my wedding in 1964 at Temple Israel, as at that time I did not know the new Rabbi there. Our son, Brian, had his Barmitzvah at Temple Emanuel in 1978 as there was by then no Hebrew school at Temple Israel. Andrew's Bar Mitzvah was conducted at Temple Israel by Reverend Mielke two years later.

I considered Temple Israel my second home and in the 1980s and early 90s was sad to see the decline of the area and the decrease in membership. During that time, I was on the management committee and had been chairman of the Sisterhood for 10 years.

In 1994, Ivor and I decided to move to Temple Emanuel, but my fond memories of Temple Israel will remain with me forever. – *Ellen Appleton*



## A lifetime of service

Around 1935, I was accepted by the British Orthodox Beth Din as a minister and took up a post in Bangor, North Wales, and then Bolton under the title of Reverend. When war broke out in '39, I volunteered to serve as a chaplain to the British forces. When Bergen-Belson was opened up, I was posted to the camp to be of assistance to survivors. Later, I took up chaplaincy duties in Germany, which involved visiting Jewish soldiers in north Germany.

I had not been very happy during my years in Bolton and in 1946, when I was approaching retirement from the army, I had in mind seeking a different career, as Orthodoxy no longer appealed to me. At that time, I saw an advertisement in the *Jewish Chronicle* for a minister to assist Rabbi Weiler in South Africa. I knew little about Reform Judaism and contacted him. Rabbi Weiler came to Germany to meet me. I, of course, as a captain, had the use of a vehicle and driver. I met Weiler and took him to Berlin and other centres. While travelling around, we discussed the principles of Reform and Weiler persuaded me to accept

the post of his second-in-command.

On being discharged from the army in November 1946, I took up the post in Johannesburg. I took charge of the very large Cheder (Hebrew School) and day-to-day matters affecting the members. Rabbi Weiler did a great deal of travelling during those years and I was therefore very active. I was involved in running services and dealing with members over the four or five years I was there.

When the second synagogue was being set up [Temple Shalom], it was assumed that I was going to be the Rabbi, but then one was brought out from the USA, so I decided to accept a post in Port Elizabeth. I was there for a while and then in Cape Town, after which I was able to take a year off and attend the Leo Baeck College in London. I was ordained as a Rabbi and returned to South Africa, when I took up the post of Rabbi in Durban.

After many happy and fulfilling years, I am fully retired and have the position of honorary president of this congregation. – *Rabbi Isaac Richards, Rabbi Emeritus, Temple David, Durban*



## FIRST PROGRESSIVE REFORM BAR MITZVAH



*Dr Willie and Eileen Grusiner*

Dr Willy "Wolfzeif" Grusiner was the first person to have a Progressive Bar Mitzvah in South Africa. Exactly 70 years ago, he celebrated his Bar Mitzvah at Temple Israel. It was July 1936, and it was the same year that Temple Israel started operating.

This July – 2006 – Willy Grusiner celebrates his 83rd birthday and he will receive an aliyah at the 70th anniversary in honour of his second Bar Mitzvah.

Willie was born on July 17, 1923 in Lithuania. He and his family arrived in South Africa via Palestine in 1926 and they lived in Postmansberg, Northern Cape, until 1929, when they moved to Kimberly. In 1933, they came to Johannesburg where his father, a professional photographer, set up his studio, Eugene Studios.

He met Rabbi MC Weiler in 1934, and studied for his Bar Mitzvah, which took place in 1936.

After matriculating, he attended Wits Medical School, and he qualified as a doctor in 1947. Two years later, he started his own practise in Pretoria.

Willie joined Temple Menorah (now Bet Menorah) in 1950 and was named honorary life member in 1983. He has been a council member for 56 years.

## My association with Temple Israel

I first attended Temple Israel in 1938 when I was 14. It was for a Sukkot service for the youth and was during school holidays. Here I met Rabbi Weiler who asked me why he had not seen me at any of the services? I told him that I was a boarder at Jeppe High School and would not be allowed to attend services so far away from the boarding school.

Then, on my first day of the new term, I was summoned to the principal's office. I wondered what terrible things I had done during the holidays and expected a caning. I always expected to be caned when I was called to his office. There stood Rabbi Weiler. The principal said that I had told Rabbi Weiler that I would like to attend the shul services, and he told me that I could go on Saturday mornings. When I finally left Jeppe High after matric, the principal told me that he had never ceased to wonder why somebody as bad as I was would want to go to shul.

After a spell up north, I returned home to start my medical studies and became a lay reader. During my years as a medical student, I continued my lay reading. Those were the days of Rabbi Weiler, Rabbi Rappaport, and our beloved Benny Stalson.

Once, during a virulent flu epidemic, after Rabbi Weiler had left to live in Israel and Rabbi Richards was in charge, the Rabbi was bedridden with flu and I was asked to conduct a cremation. Being very confident, I agreed and everything went fine, but when the time arrived for the coffin to pass through two doors following the pressing of the switch, there was a delay of nearly two minutes during which time I must have lost many pounds of sweat and swore that I would never do it again.

In 1954, after I had qualified, I went to England for a year, during which time I was married at Upper Berkeley Street Shul to Yvonne Blier. She was also closely associated with Temple Israel and has been my partner for 52 years. On returning to South Africa in 1955, I again took up my position as lay reader for a short while until I left for Durban. I have been a member of Temple David in Durban since then and a lay reader for almost 50 years.

In 1951, I was made an honorary life member of the United Johannesburg Reform Congregation, and in 1989 of the Durban Progressive Jewish Congregation. In the foyer at Temple Israel, on the board of honorary life members, my name appears third, under the names of two others, Rabbi Dr Stephen Wise and Abba Dr Hillel Silver. – *Gerald Philips*

## Remembering Alan Isaacs Camp

Alan Isaacs Camp was founded by Rabbi MC Weiler and Benny Stalson in 1942, and from that time to the early 1990s, the site in Margate on the Natal South Coast was used in December for family camps, and in April and July for youth camps.

During the rest of the year, the site was hired out at a nominal rate to other welfare organisations. The family camps were run at a profit, which helped offset the cost of running the youth camps. During the late 80s and early 90s, there was much uncertainty in the country and fundraising dwindled to a point where the committee could no longer afford to maintain the site and run camps.

At a special general meeting in 1993, it was decided to sell the camp site. This decision was not taken lightly, but with heavy hearts and much soul-searching by every member present. The site was sold, the money invested and many projects were undertaken in line with the camp objectives, which includes educational, religious and

social recreation.

With the assistance of Joel Alswang, various educational books and dictionaries were obtained and these were distributed to various underprivileged schools, especially in the rural areas.

Many children were sponsored at Netzer's annual camps and mini-machanehs. Contributions were made to be used at their discretion to further the aims of Progressive Judaism in South Africa.

Another project was the sponsoring of monthly birthday parties for children at the Johannesburg Children's Home.

Apart from the main projects, assistance was also given to various worthy causes, which did not quite fit into these categories. Some of these included annual donations to the Sisterhood Family Assistance Fund, to Hatzolah and the Chevre Kadisha.

Since the Alan Isaacs Camp was founded by Rabbi Weiler, the committee thought it fitting to donate two stoves to the MC Weiler School in Alexandra to commemorate its 60th anniversary last year. – *Gloria Fleisher*

# A LIFE devoted to Judaism

By Darryl Egnal

Benny Stalson is a living legend In Progressive Judaism. Not only has he dedicated most of his life to the South African Progressive Jewish movement, but he has also committed his retirement years to Temple Israel. In the absence of Rabbinic leadership, he has acted as teacher, lay reader and spiritual adviser.

Involvement in Temple Israel almost from the beginning, Benny Stalson joined the synagogue in the early 40s, and played an active part in its growth and development.

As executive director of the United Progressive Jewish Congregation of Johannesburg, he was instrumental in starting the North Eastern Reform Congregation (which became Temple Shalom), Beth Am (which eventually amalgamated with Temple Emanuel), Temple Emanuel and many other synagogues around the country. But he has a special place in his heart for the Mother synagogue, Temple Israel – a love that is practically expressed by the fact that he is still a regular lay reader of this shul.

Benny remembers the vibrant, exciting times at Temple Israel. "The shul became so popular that we did not have space for everyone, so had to extend the services to the Skyline Hotel. We called them the 'overflow services' because Temple Israel had become so crowded, people were overflowing into the hallways. You see, it wasn't as big as it is today; we extended it. So we used the hotel and I took the children's services there."

## Life changing decision

Benny was an avid sports fan and loved to play soccer. He played first league for the Boksburg Football Club and was soon approached to join a professional team overseas. However, a university education was a non-negotiable with his mother, and so he went to Wits to study for a Bachelor of Arts degree. After three years, he realised that his future did not lie in professional football, and Benny's focus turned to law. He registered for a post-graduate law degree, but this career was also not to be...

It was the early 40s and Rabbi Weiler needed a Hebrew teacher for the school at Temple Israel. In those days, most Jews had studied Hebrew for matric, so he thought he'd approach the Jewish students at Wits to see if they wanted part-time work.

"There were only three of us in the whole of the Wits University Hebrew faculty," says Benny. "I was approached through letters sent out by Rabbi Weiler's secretary, Cissy (Cecilia) Gluckmann; her name was Freedenthal at the time. In fact, Cissy still attends Temple Israel on the odd occasion. She must be well into her 90s now..."

"But I was an Orthodox Jew and had no time for this new Progressive Judaism. My mother however, changed my mind. She told me they were also Jews, and followed the Torah. She told me to 'go and see them'. Rabbi Weiler sold me on the idea, and I took the job teaching Hebrew. Later they put me in charge of the school," he says.

"But I had to give up my studies for my LLB. I'm sure I would've made a good lawyer, but I have no regrets. I am still very involved in and committed to Temple Israel. The shul is my passion."



## Growth and development

According to the late Rabbi Weiler, Benny was a young member of the Boksburg Orthodox community and he had been influenced, along with so many South Africans, to believe that Progressive Judaism was wrong.

But as Benny got more and more involved in the shul and the school, and discovered more about Progressive Judaism, he grew to love it. When he took over, the school had about 11 pupils. By the end of the year, there were more than 100 pupils, so more teachers had to be employed. Benny was soon involved in Temple Israel's management committee and the United Progressive Jewish Congregation (the body representing all the Gauteng synagogues at the time), and within a few years, became executive director.

## Honorary leader

Rabbi Weiler served Temple Israel for almost 25 years. After he left, Temple Israel saw many Rabbis come and go. But Benny has been a constant in the life of the community. Asked why he never became a Rabbi, his confident if somewhat sadly reflective comment is: "They couldn't spare me at the time. We discussed it, and the opportunity was there for me to go to Leo Baeck College in London, but Rabbi Weiler needed me to run the school and manage the synagogue. I would've been gone for three years, and they would not have been able to cope without me."

Benny has, to all intents and purposes, done much of the work of a Rabbi in the Progressive Jewish community. At one stage, for a period of about 15 years, Benny did not spend one single service during the High Holy Days at his own shul, because he travelled all over the country, taking services where there was no one else qualified to do so.

Temple Israel hasn't had a full-time Rabbi since December 1993 after Rabbi Michael Standfield left to join Temple Emanuel. Benny



took over as lay reader and "acting Reverend", a role he has filled since then. At one time, he was even given the title of "Honorary Reverend". He leads services, gives sermons, and conducts all lifecycle events, including weddings (he is a marriage officer), funerals and tombstone unveilings. Sadly, Temple Israel's children and young adults are few, so lifecycle events such as Brit Milah, baby namings, B'nei Mitzvah and weddings have been rare over the last few years.

### Rabbis for Temple Israel and other synagogues

Benny got to know most of the Rabbis that came to South Africa, but spoke about a few that he remembered well from the early days.

"Rabbi Isaac Richards, who was an Orthodox Reverend and army Chaplain at the time, came to South Africa from Germany at the end of 1946 to join Temple Israel as assistant Rabbi," says Benny. "Rabbi Weiler flew to Germany to talk him into coming here."

Rabbi Richards worked with Rabbi Weiler for about four years before he took up a position in Port Elizabeth and then in Cape Town. He was later given the opportunity to attend Leo Baeck College in London, and after a year, was ordained as a Progressive Rabbi. On his return, he decided to go to Temple David in Durban and has been there ever since. After he retired, he was named Rabbi Emeritus.

"Isaac Richards and I used to do exercises together when we were youngsters, you know. Oh yes," Benny says, laughing.

"Then of course, we had Rabbi Super, who was an excellent man," he says. "I got Rabbi Super to join us. He was an Orthodox Rabbi who had decided to leave the Rabbinate and came to South Africa in 1960 to become the editor of the *Zionist Record* in Johannesburg. He had already been active in the then very small Progressive community in Israel.

"When we could not get Rabbis – it was soon after Rabbi Weiler left and we needed one badly – Weiler and I spoke about the situation and he told me to go and see a man named Super at the *Zionist Record*. I knew him very well because – as executive director – I dealt a lot with the newspaper and its journalists. After a number of interviews, I asked Super to come along and assist us," says Benny.

Rabbi Arthur Saul Super joined the South African Progressive movement in 1964, starting as Rabbi at Temple Emanuel. Not long after he arrived, he was appointed the Chief Rabbi of the United Progressive Jewish Congregation of Johannesburg with his headquarters at the Mother synagogue. He remained with the movement until his retirement in 1975, when he made aliyah.

### Simchas

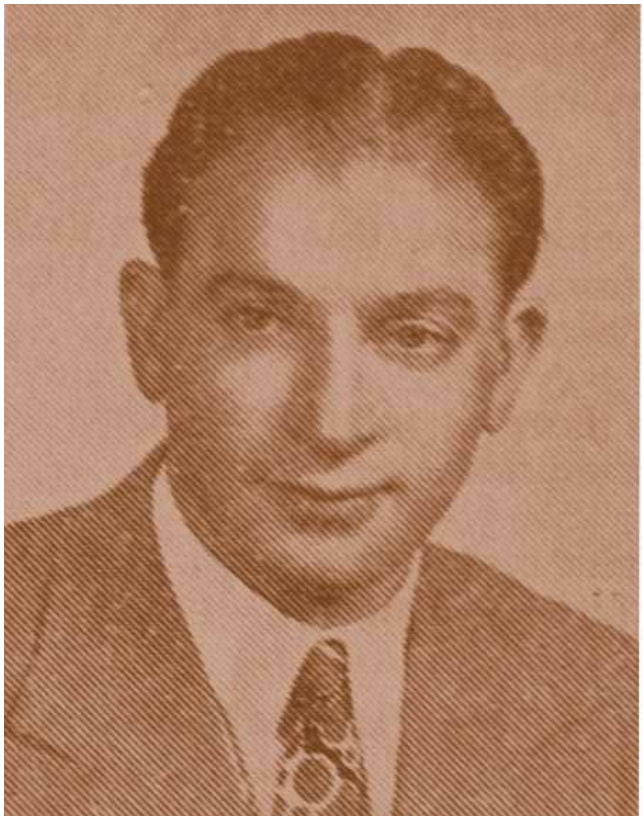
Benny recalls his desire to experience all his family simchas at Temple Israel.

"We were married there in 1956, even though May's family wanted us to get married in Salisbury, Rhodesia (now Harare in Zimbabwe)," he says. "I was executive director of the Johannesburg movement, a teacher and lay reader at Temple Israel, and I really wanted to have my wedding ceremony in my shul, conducted by Rabbi Weiler. So they eventually agreed.

"Both my daughters, Lynn and Robyn, grew up and had their B'not Mitzvah at Temple Israel," says Benny. "They even went on to do their B'not Torah and B'not Emunah, something which seldom happens nowadays."

May Stalson – who has not only been a pillar of strength to Benny, but has also contributed to the school and the shul in her own right – currently still works as a part-time secretary.

"After we got married, I started helping out with the administration," she says. "Later, I got involved in teaching at the Religion School while continuing my administrative duties, and I've been there for 50 years now. In fact, we got married on July 26, so we're celebrating our Golden Wedding anniversary as well, this year."



### Current situation

Benny is saddened by today's fragmented Progressive community. He believes that each congregation is focused entirely on its own well-being to the detriment of the whole community. Benny Stalson is one of a few people still around to remember Progressive Judaism and its beginnings, when every individual at all the synagogues throughout the country had a vested interest in the survival and growth of the community. Many of today's youngsters, he believes, don't even know the history of the movement, and how a thriving, buzzing community was developed.

Because of emigration, assimilation and disinterest in religion, the Progressive community has largely been reduced. As we do not have enough Rabbis, the situation is most discouraging.

But Benny believes that with a concerted effort between the few Rabbis we do have, and the lay leaders who care about what happens to the movement, there is hope for the future.

### A lifetime of service

Benny founded, managed and became the principal of several Hebrew schools in Johannesburg. He taught countless children their Bar and Bat Mitzvah portions, and kept Progressive Jewish education on track. He was one of the founders of the Alan Isaacs Camp in Margate; the Montagu Country Club in Morningside, on land bought by the Progressive movement; Camp Caplan in the Magaliesberg on land donated by Oscar Caplan; a youth movement called Temple Guild and later Maginim, which eventually became Netzer; and the Transvaal Inter-club Goodwill Association, which he hoped would encourage Jewish country clubs to co-operate in the staging of plays and oratory competitions.

Few people can claim to have done as much for the South African Progressive movement for as long as Benny Stalson has. Except for his wife May – in her administrative capacity – Benny is the only surviving member of the very early days of the Mother synagogue, who is still actively involved in servicing its community, and keeping Temple Israel alive.

*Kol Hakavod* to you, Benny.



### Founding members

My connection to Temple Israel goes back a long way. My parents, Max and Rita Marx, were involved with the Progressive movement in South Africa from the beginning. I was five years old when Rabbi Weiler first came to Johannesburg and I can remember that at one time he stayed with us at our home in Parkwood.

My mother spent days driving Rabbi Weiler around collecting

funds for the building of Temple Israel. In the beginning, services were held at the Coronation Hall in Mooi Street. On a Friday morning, I would go with my mother to pick leaves in what is now the Melrose Bird Sanctuary to decorate the hall.

My father was president of Temple Israel and died in office. The religion school was then named the Max Marx Hebrew School. When Rabbi Weiler married Una, my parents acted as his 'unterferurers'. I had my Bar Mitzvah at Temple Israel and was married there exactly 50 years ago. – *John Marx*

### Temple Israel celebrations

Dear Reeva... My wife, Pola, and I congratulate you, Benny Stalson and your committee for your commitment and the passion you have shown in the running of Temple Israel through difficult times. I am mindful of the security problems you have overcome and your contribution to the general Jewish community and Tikkun, and bringing so many Jews on tours to Israel who are all truly trail blazers.

You have set an example to all of us that it is not numbers that count, but the quality of dedicated, devoted people who not only talk the talk, but walk the walk. Judged by your deeds, you are a great mensch.

Once again, congratulations. May you go from strength to strength and continue your wonderful work!

I will be away in Israel visiting family from 19 July to 14 August, so please accept my apologies for not being able to attend this special occasion. I am going to miss meeting all of you and celebrating together.

*Sincerely, Simon Jocum, Cape Town*

### Temple Israel almost destroyed

A little over 20 years ago, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the SAUPJ. Many World Union representatives were here, including Rabbi Gunther Plaut.

While we had the conference service at Temple Emanuel that Friday night, an explosion rocked and badly damaged Temple Israel. But nonetheless, the next day, in the damaged temple, we held a special service at which representatives of all Jewish organisations were present. The then Chief Orthodox Rabbi, Rabbi Casper, stood outside the temple and would not enter it.

I was, to a large degree, involved in the repairs and restoration of Temple Israel. At that stage, as I was not only chairman of the SAUPJ, but also an architect, I was active in restoring the shul, and I'm happy we were able to do that so as to reach this important milestone. Mazeltov to Reeva and Temple Israel. – *Jack Jankes, honorary life president of the SAUPJ*



PS: When Adam Weiler was killed\*, Rabbi Weiler talked to me and another friend of Adam's asking that we do something to perpetuate the memory of his son. I was naive at the time and barely understood the significance of this plea.

Last year, I was in Latvia exploring my roots when I came across a Talmudic inscription on a plaque outside the Jewish section of the Liepaya (Libau) cemetery: "No man truly dies until all memories are extinguished."

A few days later, my beloved son, Craig, was tragically killed in a motor accident. I now understand the significance of Rabbi Weiler's desire to preserve Adam's memory... just as I seek to find ways to preserve Craig's memory.

And I now feel Rabbi Weiler's pain and wish I could tell him.

\* Rabbi Weiler lost two of his sons, Adam and Gideon, in the Israeli wars. Both boys grew up at Temple Israel and celebrated their B'nei Mitzvah at the synagogue.

### Poignant thoughts

Dear Reeva... I am sad that I'll not be able to attend the services on 21 and 22 July. Unfortunately, I'll be in England at the time.

My association with Temple Israel goes back to the days of Rabbi Moses Cyril Weiler. I was at school with his son Adam, who was unfortunately killed in the seven-day war. I remember visiting their home near Killarney (called "The Warren" because of the number of children).

I studied Hebrew and Judaism for a number of years before my Bar Mitzvah at the shul in 1957. Benny Stalson was my Bar Mitzvah teacher. Benny and Issy Wainer were the seniors at the Alan Isaacs Camp, which I attended a couple of times.

At the time of my Bar Mitzvah, the vibrant shul could barely accommodate all the congregants. That was before the area was reduced and when the upstairs gallery was still used. The doors were locked at the commencement of the service. When the Rabbi called for children to come up to the bimah for a blessing, there was insufficient room and the throng overflowed into the aisles.

I subsequently became an ardent secular Jew... proud of being a Jew and being a part of the Jewish history and values, but seldom going to shul except when my children were growing up. I enjoyed being part of the Jewish gatherings for services and never felt out of place as an atheist in shul.

On one of my visits to Johannesburg, I visited Temple Israel on a Saturday morning. There was no 'minyan' (quorum of 10) for the service and the 'sermon' was more a discussion as to how to increase membership and attendance. I joined. Whilst I'm hardly an active member, I do feel very much at home and hope I will be able to help keep everything going, not only because of the valuable work you do, but also to keep alive the memories of all those who played their part in the shul's history. All the best... – *Graeme Levin*



# AND IT WAS SAID... in the beginning...

There were a few men and women, an interest in a new 'modern' type of Judaism, a determination to develop and grow an idea, a belief and a community... and the foundations were laid...

The first 'hint' of Progressive (Liberal) Judaism in South Africa came when Professor Abraham Zvi Idelson visited his family in Johannesburg in September 1929 for his parents' Golden Wedding anniversary. Abraham was a professor of Jewish music at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, and while he was here, he gave talks on Jewish music as well as the nature, principles and procedures of Progressive Judaism.

He urged his brother, Jerry, to establish a group to initiate Progressive Judaism in Johannesburg, which he did. Jerry later joined his brother on a trip through Europe, where he visited Progressive synagogues and met a number of prominent Progressive Jewish leaders and Rabbis on the Continent and in England, including the Honorary Lily Montagu, who was president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. During his travels, he was impressed by the Progressive services and inspired by Ms Montagu, who later sent him the Liberal Sabbath prayer books to use for services.

On his return, he discovered the provisional committee formed before his trip was inactive and so he formed a new committee, which included Oscar Caplan, Dr Louis Freed and Sigmund Haas, among others. He conducted services in private homes during 1930, and later arranged public lectures, gave talks on the radio and wrote articles on Progressive Judaism in the Jewish and daily press.

In June 1931, the South African Jewish Religious Union for Liberal Judaism was established with Jerry as honorary secretary, and a wide media campaign was launched. In 1932, through Abraham and Lily Montagu, he started negotiating with Moses Cyrus Weiler, then a student at Hebrew Union College under the tutelage of Abraham, who was his professor. Once he was ordained, Rabbi Weiler came to Johannesburg. It was August 1933. A Progressive congregation was soon formed and the first service was held at the Freemasons' Hall.

At the end of that year, a site was purchased to build a synagogue. According to *The Star* on December 28, 1933, the Liberal Jewish movement in South Africa... has purchased a site for the erection of a Liberal Jewish Synagogue in Johannesburg, the first in South Africa. "The site covers three quarters of an acre, and is situated in Empire Road, corner of Hillside Road, just a few minutes from Clarendon Circle [and] Twist Street tram terminus."

The foundation stone of Temple Israel was laid by the then Mayor of Johannesburg, Councillor Maurice Freeman, on 22 September 1935, and the official opening of the shul took place on 23 August 1936. The first High Holy Days services that year brought in a large number of new members and other interested people.

"During the next three years, progress was slight and it seemed that for once, the Rabbi had been too optimistic – the temple stood more like a Temple of Hope than a Temple of Achievement. But a Temple Israel Hebrew School was established and children's services were instituted. This was completely revolutionary. The children themselves conducted the Sabbath morning service almost in its entirety, and the first such service was attended by 20 children."

(*UPJC Jubilee Retrospective, 1983*). And if you manage to entice the children... the parents will always follow.

Rabbi Weiler's insight and vision were clear from the beginning. As early as 1933, he was able to persuade the committee that certain principles must be adhered to with regard to membership – the most important being complete equality between men and women, and the practice of unassigned seats. "There must never be any vestige of differentiation between a rich man and a poor man," he said.

This insight followed through to all Rabbi Weiler's pioneering activities and the committee's visionary ideals, and as a result, Temple Israel flourished and the Progressive movement grew exponentially.

And the rest, as they say, is history...



*The Star*. 20.10.1931

#### LIBERAL JUDAISM MEETING IN JOHANNESBURG

A general meeting of members of the Jewish Religious Union will be held at the Jewish Guild on Tuesday, October 20, at 8 p.m. The purpose of the meeting is to confirm the constitution which has been carefully prepared by the committee. It is noteworthy that an important clause in the constitution states that the aim of the Jewish Religious Union is to stimulate and inspire an intensive interest in Judaism and to overcome religious apathy and indifference and to establish a branch of the Progressive Jewish Movement (Liberal Judaism) in South Africa. In view of the importance of the decisions to be taken at this meeting, a full attendance of those interested is anticipated. An important communication will be read from the headquarters of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. The hon. secretary of the local branch of the Jewish Religious Union is Mr. J. Idelson.

#### Sources

- *The Southern African Union for Progressive Judaism Golden Jubilee magazine, 1981*
- *The United Progressive Jewish Congregation of Johannesburg Golden Jubilee magazine, 1983*
- *Anmi, Winter 1981/82, published by the World Union for Progressive Judaism, with a special focus on South Africa and the first 50 years.*
- *Newspaper cuttings and other material sourced from Temple Israel's archives.*



## Professor Abraham Zvi Idelsohn

Professor Abraham Zvi Idelsohn has been acknowledged as the pioneer in the research and revival of Jewish music. His lifelong work in research and collecting indigenous ancient melodies of various Oriental and East European Jewish communities was published in his monumental work, the *Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies* in 10 volumes in Hebrew, English and German.

Abraham lived in South Africa in the early 1900s. Here he held the position of cantor at a suburban synagogue before proceeding to Jerusalem, where he became a music lecturer. In 1922, he left Jerusalem for Europe and the UK on a lecture tour and to supervise the publication of his books, which included *Sefer Hashirim* and *Shirat Shabbat* music for the synagogue, among others.

Abraham was then offered the position of professor of Music and

Liturgy at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. Many of his pupils went on to distinguish themselves as Rabbis all over the world, one of whom was Rabbi MC Weiler.

Abraham visited South Africa again in 1937. By then, he had become disabled and ill. However, he was able to see his vision to establish Progressive Judaism in South Africa become a reality. When he passed away in August 1938, a special memorial service was held at Temple Israel, where his former pupil, Rabbi Weiler, delivered a most impressive and stirring oration. He was cremated and his remains interred in the Progressive Jewish section at Brixton cemetery.

Abraham Idelsohn's memory is immortalised not only by his books, but also by the hundreds of liturgical and secular songs he composed. His *Hava Nagila* is still the most popular of Hebrew songs to this day. *Source: The United Progressive Jewish Congregation of Johannesburg Golden Jubilee magazine, 1983*

## Jeremiah Idelson



Jeremiah (Jerry) Idelson\* was born in Libau, Latvia on the 12 December 1893, where he received his Hebrew, Talmudic and musical education. He came to South Africa in 1912 with plans to return to Europe to further his studies, but because of the First World War, he had to stay in the country.

In 1920, he became interested in Jewish music and gave talks and wrote many articles

on the subject. In 1935, he organised public concerts of Jewish music in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, among other places. Jerry worked in broadcasting for 20 years and a number of his own compositions were broadcast. In 1924, he was awarded a prize for the best original work.

After the Progressive congregation was formed in 1933, Jerry, a musician and composer, organised the choir and became honorary choirmaster, a position he held in addition to honorary secretary for

many years. The congregation eventually hired a professional secretary, and not too long afterwards, his status as honorary choirmaster changed and he too was hired on a professional basis.

He held various positions over the years, including head of the Bar and Bat Mitzvah department, elevating the standard of Bar and Bat Mitzvah to a higher level. He was also responsible for placing girls equally with boys, thus enabling them to perform their B'not Mitzvah on Saturday mornings as well.

At the congregation's first Simchat Torah ball in 1933, Jerry was presented with a silver mounted baton as a sign of esteem. He was made an honorary life member of the congregation in 1936 and in 1968 was awarded a founder's certificate.

Jerry was active at the opening of most of the synagogues in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Germiston, Springs, the Cape and Durban. He was made honorary life member of the South African Union for Progressive Judaism in July 1971 in recognition of his services to the liturgy of music of the Progressive Jewish movement of South Africa. A great part of Progressive liturgy is due to him, as he not only compiled previous works, but also wrote new ones. He introduced important musical services, as well as a complete Shabbat evening service, which he composed.

When Jerry died a few months after his 81st birthday in 1974, he had served the cause of Judaism faithfully for nearly 50 years in various capacities. *Source: The United Progressive Jewish Congregation of Johannesburg Golden Jubilee magazine, 1983*

\* Jerry Idelson dropped the "h" in his name, which is why he and his brother have different spellings for their names.

## Spin-offs of the movement

### Alan Isaacs Camp

In the early 40s, Benny Stalson approached Henry Isaacs, a town councillor and member of Temple Israel, who was also involved in property (JH Isaacs), to donate some land at Sunny Brae in Margate for a youth camp. "Henry promised us the land, and I promised to name the camp after his son, Alan, who had died young of a heart attack," says Benny. "And in 1942, together with Joel Alswang, we started non-denominational camps as well as Jewish youth camps, which went on for many years until the camp site was sold." The Alan Isaacs Trust was started with these funds.

### The Montagu Club

The Montagu Club was started by Benny Stalson in 1946 after

discussions with Rabbi MC Weiler. Rabbi Weiler wanted to join a bowling club, but as mentioned in his humorous speech at the opening: "I found that two clubs would not have me because, as it was tactfully put to me, I might cause embarrassment whenever they used unparliamentary language on the bowling green. As soon as this happened, I immediately told my friend, Benjamin Stalson, that we must organise a country club under the auspices of the congregation.

"This club is fittingly named after the Honorable Lily Montagu, the president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, who has devoted all her life to Judaism, to social service and social justice," he said

"This club is also a great monument to Benny Stalson, the executive director of the congregation. Mr Stalson has been an invaluable asset to the congregation and community as a whole. He has been the moving spirit in many activities, and he has already established for himself two monuments – the Alan Isaacs Camp at

## Rabbi Dr Moses Cyrus Weiler

Rabbi Dr Moses Cyrus Weiler was born in Riga, Latvia, on the 23 March 1907 where his grandfather was a prominent member of the Chassidic community. His paternal great-grandfather belonged to the House of Schneur Zalman of Ladi, the founder of intellectual Chassidim, and was editor of Schneur Zalman's *magnum opus*, *the Tanya*.

Rabbi [Weiler] received his first Jewish and general education in Riga. He completed his studies at the Modern Hebrew School under the auspices of the Society for the Promotion of Culture Among Jews and at the old classical German Gymnasium. In 1924, he proceeded to Palestine. He graduated two years later from the Herziah Gymnasium, Tel Aviv – the first modern school employing Hebrew as its medium.

In 1926, with assistance of the late Dr Cyrus Adler, president of the College, he left for America to become a student at the Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning in Philadelphia. He graduated with a BA at Delaware University after two years, and [four years later] received his Rabbinical diploma at the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati. In the early 30s, Hebrew Union College bestowed upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity in recognition of his outstanding services in the cause of Progressive Judaism.

[On his] ordination in 1933, Rabbi [Weiler] was sent to South Africa by the World Union for Progressive Judaism...

Working not only for Progressive Judaism, but also for the Jewish and general community as a whole, Rabbi [Weiler] undertook a number of important missions. These included fundraising efforts on behalf of Israel, and lecture tours for various causes, which took him as far afield as South West Africa [now Namibia], Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe], the Copper Belt, Nyasaland, the Belgian Congo and Kenya.

He also paid numerous visits overseas, especially to Israel, where he represented South Africa at world congresses.

Until his departure from South Africa in 1958, he had served for many years as a member of the executive of the SA Zionist Federation. He was vice-chairman of the Non-Party Association of SA Zionists and of the Jewish National Fund, and an active member of many other bodies.

In March 1942, he married Una Gelman of Bulawayo, southern Rhodesia...

*The above article appeared in January 1959 in a special edition of The Progressive Jew, the SAUPJ newsletter at the time. The issue was dedicated to Rabbi Dr Moses Cyrus Weiler, who had made aliyah*



on January 1, 1958. The article was also reproduced in the United Progressive Jewish Congregation of Johannesburg's Golden Jubilee magazine, as were the following paragraphs.

Rabbi Weiler has also maintained a very close and active contact with us, and has made frequent visits of shorter or longer duration. The most notable were to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the congregation in 1958, our delayed 30th anniversary in 1964, the Silver Jubilee of Temple Shalom in 1970, his 70th birthday, the consecration of Temple David (now Bet David) in 1977, and the Golden Jubilee of the SAUPJ in 1981.

A number of honours were bestowed upon Rabbi Weiler. In March 1983, he was elected an honorary member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis to commemorate the 50th year since his ordination, was named honorary life vice-president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism; and was made a *Yakir Yerushalayim* – a distinguished citizen of Jerusalem.

When Prime Minister Menachem Begin went on his historical visit to President Anwar Sadat in Egypt in April 1979, Rabbi Weiler accompanied him.

The Weilers had five sons and one daughter before Majors Adam and Gideon Weiler were killed in Israeli wars. While he was alive, Rabbi Weiler worked constantly to perpetuate the memory of his two sons, endowing lectureships and bursaries, establishing libraries and more in their names.

Margate... and this club.

"It is not sufficient for us merely to propose a vote of thanks to Mr Stalson. We owe much more to him..." Rabbi Weiler said. *The Progressive Observer*, February 1957.

### Camp Caplan

Camp Caplan in the Magaliesburg was founded in March 1966 by the United Progressive Jewish Congregation of Johannesburg in order to give expression to the ethical ideals of the Jewish faith.

It's purpose was to provide holiday facilities in appealing and pleasant surroundings for the under-privileged regardless of denomination or age. At the same time, it also served as a recreation and inland youth centre for the congregation.

The land for Camp Caplan was donated by Oscar and Ruby Caplan, and it was run by Ruby Caplan as chairman, and Ida Harman

as honorary secretary for nearly 20 years. In the late 80s, Camp Caplan was sold to Selwyn Segal (Camp David) and the Camp Caplan Trust was started with the money raised from the sale.

The Camp Caplan Trust's aim is to support Jewish education and has been used to sponsor South Africans who were interested in the Rabbinate.

### TAKE NOTE!

Due to space constraints, we have compiled a condensed version of the history of Progressive Judaism in South Africa and its founders. If you'd like to find out more, the archives are kept at Temple Israel and Temple Emanuel. Similarly, we did not have space for all of the messages received, but we'd like to thank all those who sent messages or memories that were not included.

# PROUD TO BE part of our heritage

By David Pincus

Temple Israel has become an important part of Reeva Forman's life. Not only is she committed to keeping the Mother synagogue open for the few Jews left in Hillbrow and the surrounding areas, but she is also determined to help the disadvantaged people around the shul. She may not have been around for much of Temple Israel's existence, but she is in it for the long haul.

When she joined Temple Israel 14 years ago, Reeva Forman, who has been chairman of Temple Israel's management committee for the last 12 years, had every right to say: "Done that, been there, got the tee-shirt."

She was a supermodel before the term was invented. She was voted Model of the Year for two successive years while still a teenager in South Africa, and then went on to model for several years in the UK and Europe.

She was already a successful businesswoman, an acknowledged motivational speaker and trainer involved in empowerment among all sections of society.

In 1979, she became the first woman president of the Junior Chamber of Commerce (JCC), and she became Businesswoman of the Year in 1983. She has an honours degree in psychology.

While president of the JCC, "long before the new South Africa", she was recognised internationally for running a black executive development programme, which was sponsored by Barclays Bank.

Reeva could have said "that's it," and continued with her business career. However, Temple Israel beckoned and she joined in 1992. "At the time, there were many more members than we have now," she says, "but it still had that warm, caring Jewish family ethos. I was part

that we, as a Jewish community, were reaching out to those who needed that extra educational input."

Reeva, who became chairman in 1994, regards keeping Temple Israel open and a fully functional synagogue as one of her most meaningful achievements in her 12 years as chairman. The odds were stacked against her and her committee because most people who were involved in one or other way with the synagogue wanted to sell the synagogue and cut their losses.

"But I believe in the validity of serving the few, no matter how few; in the true Jewish tradition: 'If you save one life, you save the world'.

"For this success," she says, "I am most grateful to my management committee and, most of all, to Benny Stalson who supported me, and has become our spiritual leader. He conducts Saturday morning and Pesach services. I'm equally indebted to Bill Hoffman, who has been a congregant for many years, and how he is available every Friday night to conduct Shabbat services with me. Mention must be made also of lay reader Brian Segal who is also always ready to help.

"I'm equally grateful to the late Oscar Caplan, who with his wife, Ruby, were founder members of the synagogue. They headed up the Camp Caplan Trust and it is through the generosity of this Trust, which realised the importance of serving the local Jewish community, that we are able to bring out a Rabbi from overseas once a year on the High Holy Days to lead the services for those who live in Hillbrow, Berea, Yeoville and the surrounding areas, and who cannot afford to pay full fees."

She is also deeply appreciative of the generosity of the Chevra Kadisha and the Jewish Family Assistance Fund "who sponsor needy Jewish people living in our area, to enjoy our Pesach seders, which are attended by about 80 people every year.

"And, because of the generosity of a donor who wishes to remain anonymous, and Cynthia Duchon of Cooksisters Catering, we have an annual Shabbat Shuvah dinner for 80 or more people. This means that twice a year, Jewish people who do not have access to a synagogue, or Jewish family members, can experience the beauty of our Jewish traditions and religion in an environment which, to them, is warm and accepting and not threatening. We hope we will attract them to regular Shabbat services and very slowly we are succeeding," says Reeva.

"I am also very proud of two outreach projects. The one is the wonderful MC Weiler School in Alexandra, which was started over 60 years ago by the women of Temple Israel under the late Rabbi MC Weiler, who believed the duties of a Jew included helping not only co-

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Most people who were involved in one or other way with the synagogue wanted to sell the synagogue and cut their losses. "But I believe in the validity of serving the few, no matter how few, in the true Jewish tradition: 'If you save one life, you save the world'.

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of a synagogue that meant a great deal to those who had been there for many years prior to my joining. But I felt they needed me as much as I needed them."

The feeling of history created by a synagogue built in the late 30s also proved to be an attraction. "In addition," says Reeva, who spends a lot of her time professionally and personally helping less fortunate people, "two of our congregants, Michael Piccardi, who has since emigrated, and the late Anne Penn, started a pre-school for disadvantaged black children who lived in our area. To me that meant



religionists, but all those around you who needed help.

"That was long before I became involved with Temple Israel, but it means that our Mother synagogue has handed down that important ethic of reaching out to others, not only to members of your faith, but also to all who are around your synagogue or who belong to your country and need help. I believe that's uniquely Jewish, but I also think it's a moral principle that should be adopted by everyone."

When Michael Piccardi went overseas, Reeva was invited by the late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris, Bertie Lubner and Herbie Rosenberg to join Ma Afrika Tikkun, which had been started by them as a Jewish initiative to help the previously disadvantaged. "Ma Afrika Tikkun, in partnership with Temple Israel, took over the running of the pre-school on our premises. In addition, we currently have projects to help the unemployed on the streets, including running a soccer team for street children." she says.

Reeva stresses that the Temple Israel community is part of Hillbrow "and being part of it means that we can understand more easily what the community needs. We fully believe in and support Hillbrow's regeneration, and the regeneration of the inner city.

"We're in the same region as the Constitutional Court and aim to play our part in returning Hillbrow to its former status as a vibrant suburb. We're working with property developers, all inner city agencies and the city council to make this area home to a vibrant community. If we succeed, we'll be part of a fine Jewish contribution. There are many other Jewish and non-Jewish initiatives in Hillbrow, not only ours, and Hillbrow needs these and more."

To quote from her last AGM report: "Temple Israel has operated

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*"It is very rewarding to see the pleasure on the faces of these Jews on a Shabbat morning when forming part of a caring Jewish family. No person, no matter what his or her circumstances, feels threatened or embarrassed to come to shul, precisely because the synagogue and its surroundings are so totally devoid of any pretension."*

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in a difficult environment – one which has not improved over the last year. There is hope that with the emphasis on upgrading Hillbrow and its proximity to the new Constitutional Court, this will improve. Hillbrow is perceived as uninviting and dangerous. However, as usual, the perception far outweighs the reality. And it is only by enticing people with whatever means possible to come to Temple Israel, that they realise the reality is not that bad.

"Each year, we sponsor two dinners during Pesach and the High Holy Days – each with more than 80 people attending, of which approximately 30% are paid members. However, this does testify to the presence of Jews in the area. These people are beginning to attend regular Shabbat services; however, they can contribute very little financially and are sponsored...



"To this end, Temple Israel falls in the category of a 'Mitzvah\*\* synagogue', reaching out to both Jew and non-Jew alike. This is a vital project not only to Temple Israel, but we believe to Progressive Judaism in South Africa."

Reeva strongly believes this, which is why she is so intent on keeping the doors of the Mother synagogue open. "The shul is fully operative, in spite of its surroundings. It is very rewarding to see the pleasure on the faces of these Jews on a Shabbat morning when forming part of a caring Jewish family. No person, no matter what his or her circumstances, feels threatened or embarrassed to come to shul, precisely because the synagogue and its surroundings are so totally devoid of any pretension.

"Besides, this is our Mother synagogue. It's our history; our roots are here and we can't ignore that... after all, what are we if we don't know our history; and if we close the Mother synagogue, that history dies with it. I may be one of only a few who cares what happens to Temple Israel, but the few will become the many if I have anything to do with it."

And knowing Reeva, she probably will.

*Reeva is a member of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and the SA Zionist Federation management committee.*

*\*\* The literal meaning of Mitzvah is 'commandment', but we are 'commanded' to do good deeds, so in this context, Mitzvah can be termed 'good deeds':.)*

I would like to acknowledge and thank my loyal and supportive management committee and admin staff. Benny Stalson, Alec Kier, Stan Forman, Renee Kohn, Mercia Kaliski, Ruth Leveson, Serona Reitsik, Jack and Glenda Stiddolph, Peter Joffee, David Faivel, May Stalson. I'd also like to thank Micheal Jerome and Winnie Nkomo, the staff at Temple Israel. I'd also like to thank my brother, Stan, for his love and moral support since I became chairman.

# PERSONAL ties to our history

Rabbi Charles Wallach remembers Temple Israel, his days as a lay reader and his introduction into the Rabbinate with fondness.

My own personal ties with Temple Israel actually go back to my parents. They were married there in 1949 by Rabbi Weiler himself. Their very involvement speaks volumes of the importance of Temple Israel and the Progressive movement generally in the lives of so many.

My late father was perhaps more traditional. Often he would tell me that a more conservative style of service would have been to his liking. However, my mother, as recently as a few months back, recalled that when they decided to marry, it was she who said that it could only be in a shul where she could sit side by side with my father – for him to sit downstairs and her upstairs would mean nothing to her! And so the die was cast!

Our family was actually more involved in the old Temple Shalom, as that was our neighbourhood congregation. Both my sister, Ruth, and I celebrated our B'nei Mitzvah there. Of course, Temples Israel, Shalom and Emanuel were all to feature in my life and in the lives of my contemporaries even before Bar or Bat Mitzvah. In those days, Jerry Idelson was head of Bar Mitzvah and we all had to appear before him prior to our final exam. He was a tiny gentleman, but he could strike fear into you if you did not know your stuff.

From day one at Religion School, I was in the junior choir, and annually, a 'choir jamboree' was held between the three children's choirs. These ended abruptly when the sole judge, Jerry Idelson, named Temple Israel the winner when Shalom was clearly better that year!!

Two other annual contests between the shuls were held. An annual athletics contest and a quiz. Such friendly rivalries allowed for a sense of camaraderie, which was further enhanced at adult level by a quiz featuring the three Johannesburg congregations and those in Pretoria, Springs and Germiston. The genial quizmaster was Izzy Wainer, who filled many positions.

One of these was as the superintendent of Alan Isaacs Camp, the venue for the annual three-week holiday near Margate where children from all three temples played, prayed, studied and swam. This laid the foundation for what eventually became Maginim and later Netzer. Indeed, after being initiated by Benny Stalson and Izzy Wainer, among others, Alan Morris became first youth director and later administrative director of the UPJC.

By the time I attended my second camp, I was 14 and had become a junior lay reader. This happened because almost as soon as I had celebrated my Bar Mitzvah, my mother insisted I study further, not just in terms of the post-Bar Mitzvah programme, but more besides. The plan at the time was for all post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah education to be centralised at Temple Israel. And so it was that I spent

every Saturday morning in the discussion class led by Aleck Goldberg, who later became executive director of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies; Eric Bernstein, at the time associate director of the Board; or Mr Temple Israel himself, Benny Stalson. On Mondays, some of my friends and I would learn Hebrew with Rachel Locketz, long-time teacher at Temple Israel.

When I was 15, about 15 of us participated in the annual Confirmation ceremony on Shavuot. Ben and Bat Torah at age 16 had been established almost as a 'going away' present to our movement by Rabbi Weiler as long ago as 1957 and that was still a feature.

In fact, the annual Ben/Bat Torah ceremony was published in the *Sunday Times* with the names of the participants being stated individually. The arrival of Rabbi Ahron Opher as Chief Rabbi of our movement in the mid-1960s allowed for the additional, American-inspired Confirmation ceremony. In time, Confirmation was translated into Hebrew and became known as Ben/Bat Emunah and so, at that time, a two-stage post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonial was established.

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The Saturday morning programme focused on the aforementioned discussion group with its annual oratorical contest. This was a contest where each of us would speak on a Jewish topic, sometimes chosen by us, sometimes by Benny Stalson. I recall one person talking on 'a great gentleman Hakoach'. Hakoach was actually a football team in Vienna before the war. The speaker didn't know, but that didn't stop a fine impromptu speech. I myself was the winner on one occasion, as I recall. I can't remember my topic, but I do recall writing the speech for the runner up as well. She was a girl I fancied at the time.

My own involvement deepened with the arrival of Rabbi Arthur Super. As many know, this brilliant man was struck by a paralysis, which eventually bound him to a wheelchair. On Saturday

mornings, the physical side of conducting services effectively had to be done by others, and gradually I became the permanent assistant. In addition, my Monday afternoon study sessions were now on Fridays and with the Rabbi.

This meant that not only was I introduced to texts, but also to the 'nuts and bolts' of the Rabbinate. Rabbi Super held a regular discussion for adults before the service as well, and so Saturday mornings at 'TI' were bubbly affairs with Religion School, post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah, adult education and usually a Bar or Bat Mitzvah taking place.

Among the personalities not yet mentioned, I wish to recall Toby Lowenstein, the head of the Religion School during those years. It was he who allowed me and others like Brian Frankenstein to tutor children when we ourselves were only 15 and 16. These were our first steps towards entering the educational world, soon to be followed by our jointly leading a southern suburbs Progressive Jewish group on successive Friday evenings.

The group was not to last, but I know I had by then made up my mind to enter the Rabbinate, and Brian, I am sure, would look back to those years as the base of his fine teaching career.

While at university, I was also added to the Friday evening lay readers list, and eventually to that of the High Holy Days. The former was after the tragic death of Ralph Schwab, long-time lay reader who died after being hit by a car after conducting a Shabbat evening service.

My 'baptism', if one can use the word, was to be present when Rabbi Weiler paid one of his periodic visits. I must have passed, for I then also became one of the anchor lay readers for the daily evening service. Sometimes not even a *minyan* was present, but for those who wanted to say *kaddish*, it was special. I recall the Rugby Springbok, Syd Nomis, coming for the full traditional 11 months following his father's death.

And for two brief periods in the 1970s, I was the unnamed, but effective Rabbi of Temple Israel. In mid-1974, I returned from my Rabbinic studies at the Leo Baeck College in London to spend my final vacation before graduation here in Johannesburg.

My senior colleagues decided to give me all the practical work at Temple Israel – funerals, *britot* and so on. A year later, I returned, principally to be Rabbi of the small Temple Sinai Congregation in Sandringham. My duties included being responsible for conversions and so weekly, I spent more than a little time at Temple Israel where people such as Myra Kramer and a whole host of others administrated what we Rabbis had to officiate.

Rabbi Super had retired and for a year or so, Dr Israel ben Yosef succeeded him. Israel was first and foremost a scholar and eventually returned to academia. By then, I had more or less decided to accept a call to England, but in the nine months between January and September 1977, I 'helped out at old TI'. There I had a memorable experience, for bequeathed to me, as it were, was a septagenarian secretary, one Annemarie Herrmann. She had a comment about every member and a simple solution for the problems of the lonely. Her regular comment remains unprintable, but was always said with a smile and with much delight!




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I salute Temple Israel on its 70th. Years after my connection to the the synagogue had ended, I passed through. Herbert Richer was then in the driving seat and he was ill. No matter. Benny Stalson found me. "Charles," he said in his familiar rasping voice, "could you conduct two funerals?" And so I did, together with Shabbat evening and morning services.

Indeed, since one of those funerals was at a grave alongside the path to our Memorial Wall at West Park, I often reflect on that week, as I do when I pass Anne Herrmann's grave. And over the years, whether meeting up with former members now resident abroad, as my wife Marilyn and I did from time to time, or Rabbi Weiler, as we did on a regular basis when resident in Jerusalem, the memories remain.

*Hashana overet vehamangina nisheret.* (The years pass, but the melody lingers on.)

*Rabbi Charles Wallach is currently the Rabbi at Temple Emanuel in Parktown, Johannesburg*



# SISTERHOOD means service



In his wisdom, Rabbi MC Weiler foresaw the important role that women could play in our movement. He encouraged the women who attended his services to form a Sisterhood where they would work for the movement and the community at large. Monica Solomon, president of the South Africa Union of Temple Sisterhoods (SAUTS), gives a brief overview.

"Sisterhood means service" was the motto adopted by the women who became known as the Sisterhood of Johannesburg Jewish Reform. This first Sisterhood was formed on 30 August 1933 and its motto was carried over to all other Sisterhoods that followed.

The first Progressive synagogue to be built was Temple Israel in Hillbrow, and this synagogue established its own Temple Sisterhood in 1936. As the years went on and more synagogues were established, Sisterhoods were started at all the temples in South Africa and what was then southern Rhodesia. The Sisterhoods in the then Transvaal fell under the umbrella of the United Sisterhood (formerly Sisterhood of Johannesburg Jewish Reform).

In 1951, Ethel Smith, a founding member, attended a convention of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS) in Cleveland, Ohio, and this provided the

inspiration for the formation of a national body, the Southern African Union of Temple Sisterhoods (SAUTS), in April 1952. At the very first conference, held at Temple (now Bet) Menorah in Pretoria, Ethel Smith was not only elected president, but also honorary life president of the SAUTS.

Biennial conferences were held in all the major centres in South Africa as well as in Bulawayo. In 1954, the SAUTS gained full representation on the SAUPJ administrative bodies, and in 1955, became an affiliated member of the Union of Jewish Women of South Africa.

The first Sisterhood Sabbath was organised nationally in 1959 and since then, this Sabbath has been celebrated each year on the first Shabbat in March.

Sisterhoods in Gauteng, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town administer feeding schemes which care for the underprivileged; they assist students where possible, distribute grocery hampers for the



RITA MARX  
Chairman, 1936/7/8.



DORIS FRANKS  
Chairman, 1933-35.



Photographs taken from the United Sisterhood archives. Doris Franks (bottom left) was the first chairman in 1933 and Rita Marx (top left) followed in 1936. A Sisterhood function gets coverage in *The Progressive Observer* in 1958, and an early United Sisterhood committee, which included founding members.



From now (left to right): Mrs. D. Franka, Mrs. E. Kantor (Former Chairman), Mrs. R. Marks, (left to right) Mrs. M. Marks, Mrs. E. Lurie, Mrs. H. Cassel, Mrs. T. Fischgrund, Mrs. E. Berman.

various Chaggim, give care to the aged, teach life skills and visit the sick and institutionalised.

Fundraising is undertaken by all the Sisterhoods in order to finance their projects and these efforts take the form of book sales, jumble sales, whiskey tasting evenings, food collections, the sale of Judaica, concerts and the like. With the exception of the United Sisterhood, which is a professional fundraising organisation, all Sisterhoods operate on a strictly voluntary basis.

Besides caring for those in our own country who need our help, the Sisterhoods in South Africa help those beyond our borders who have fallen on hard times. During the past few years, we have provided more than 5000 shabbat dinners for the Jews in Argentina; helped two school girls with transport and food for a year (also in Argentina); assisted women in the Ukraine establish Jewish homes with the provision of Judaica; and provided new clothing for children in Israel who have been affected by the ongoing terror. The United Sisterhood also sends food to Zimbabwe and gives assistance to a soup kitchen in Jerusalem.

The SAUTS is a committed member of the Coordinating Council of National Jewish Women's Organisations of South Africa and one of our members is its ambassador. The SAUTS is a founder member of the Shalom Bayit project, which provides a safehouse for abused women. We are also represented on the board of Women for Reform Judaism, our parent body based in the United States; and have a seat on the governing body of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

On behalf of all the Sisterhood women in South Africa, I would like to congratulate Temple Israel on its 70th birthday.



## Keeping the legacy alive

*In his book, Long Walk to Freedom, Nelson Mandela wrote about the commitment of the United Jewish Reform Congregation to the MC Weiler School in Alexander, even when churches and other groups were pulling out of schools in the area.*

"In 1953, the Nationalist-dominated Parliament passed the Bantu Education Act, which sought to put apartheid's stamp on African education. The Act transferred control of African education from the Department of Education to the much loathed Native Affairs Department. Under the Act, African primary and secondary schools operated by church and mission bodies were given the choice of turning over their schools to the government or receiving gradually diminished subsidies; either the government took over education for Africans or there would be no education for Africans. African teachers were not permitted to criticize the government or any school authority. It was intellectual *baasskap*, a way of institutionalizing inferiority.

"Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, the minister of Bantu Education, explained that education 'must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life'. His meaning was that Africans did not and would not have any opportunities; therefore, why educate them? 'There is no place for the Bantu in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour,' he said. In short, Africans should be trained to be menial workers, to be in a position of perpetual subordination to the white man.

"To the ANC, the Act was a deeply sinister measure designed to restart the progress of African culture as a whole and, if enacted, permanently set back the freedom struggle of the African people. The mental outlook of all future generations of Africans was at stake. As Professor Matthews wrote at the time, 'Education for ignorance and for inferiority in Verwoerd's schools is worse than no education at all.'

"The Act and Verwoerd's crude exposition of it aroused widespread indignation from both black and white. With the exception of the Dutch Reformed Church, which supported apartheid, and the Lutheran mission, all Christian churches opposed the new measure. But the unity of the opposition extended only to condemning the policy, not resisting it.

"The Anglicans, the most fearless and consistent critics of the new policy, were divided. Bishop Ambrose Reeves of Johannesburg took the extreme step of closing his schools, which had a total enrolment of 10 000 children. But the archbishop of the church in South Africa, anxious to keep children off the streets, handed over the rest of the schools to the government.

"Despite their protests, all the other churches did the same with the exception of the Roman Catholics, the Seventh Day Adventists, and the United Jewish Reformed Congregation – who soldiered on without state aid. Even my own church, the Wesleyan, handed over their 200 000 African students to the government. If all the other churches had followed the example of those who resisted, the government would have been confronted with a stalemate that might have forced a compromise. Instead, the state marched over us." Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*



# A LEGACY Of which to be proud

Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler’s legacy lives on in the MC Weiler School in Alexandra, a township on the outskirts of Sandton, north of Johannesburg. The school celebrated its 60th anniversary last year and this historical account was put together by the United Sisterhood in honour of Rabbi Weiler and of this auspicious occasion.

In 1945, Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler, while visiting Alexandra Township, noted the number of small children playing in the streets while their parents were at work. Realising the need for schooling for these children he, together with Rita Marx (chairman of the United Sisterhood) and Una Weiler (wife of Rabbi Weiler) decided to find a suitable place to start a school.

Eventually a small, dilapidated four-room house was found to rent. Una and Rita cleaned up the house, painted it throughout and brightened up the exterior window frames and doors with blue paint.

A young teacher, Hilda Phahle, was employed and her first pupils were 36 children taken off the streets. She recalled smearing dung on the floors to keep the dust down and cooking meals for the children she had gathered off the streets.

The school was named *Jabulani* meaning "happiness". The enthusiasm and encouragement of Rita and Una, together with Ethel Smith and Selma Gottlieb, contributed much in the first years of the school's existence.

The Sisterhood continued to hold cake sales, jumble sales, bridge drives and more to raise funds for the school. A dentist's chair and dental equipment were donated to the school and a dentist, Dr Sergay, attended to the dental needs of the children on a voluntary and regular basis. Rabbi Weiler did much during these years to help raise funds for the school.

Four years after the founding of the school, rapid growth called for new premises. A plot of ground was bought and a small school with four classrooms was built by the United Sisterhood. Under Hilda's supervision, there were now 110 children and two teachers at the school.

On 2 January 1949, the school was officially opened by the Mayor of Johannesburg, SP Lee, and was renamed the MC Weiler School in honour of Rabbi Weiler.

By 1954, there were 266 pupils housed in 14 classrooms. Extra rooms were rented all over Alexandra and classes were held in old church halls, cottages and abandoned shops. Hilda spent a good deal of time and much shoe leather supervising her scattered domain.

### Government take-over of all black education

In 1953, the Bantu Education Board took over all black education in South Africa. With the exception of the Roman Catholics, the Seventh Day Adventists and the United Progressive Jewish Congregation, all other church and religious bodies either handed over their schools or closed them. The few who resisted soldiered on without state aid. (See excerpt from *Long Walk to Freedom* on the previous page)

In 1955, the Bantu Education Board of the ruling white apartheid government forcefully took over ALL black education in South Africa.

Sadly, the MC Weiler School became a 'government' school. However, the upkeep of the land and buildings still had to be financed and serviced by the United Sisterhood. It was also necessary for the Sisterhood to subsidise the salaries of the teachers for many years. Although the Sisterhood's jurisdiction over the school changed, its commitment never wavered. In fact, the Sisterhood resented this take-over.

It is a well known fact that 'black government schools' were provided with very little other than school premises, an enforced syllabus and meagre staff salaries. Teacher qualifications were of no importance and anyone with a Std 6 certificate (eight years schooling) was eligible for employment at black schools.

The Sisterhood women recognised the need for a healthy, safe and uplifting school environment and channelled their energies and

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funds into providing needy children with food and clothing and to seeing that classrooms were maintained and painted. As many teaching aids as possible were provided and the library was stocked with suitable books.

During the following years, it became more and more difficult for the Sisterhood women to provide services at the school, but they continued their sponsorship by feeding the children and supporting the staff and pupils on an ongoing basis.

In November 1956, when the final bond repayment on the school was made, the event was celebrated with a party at the school and each of the 370 children was presented with a new school shirt. Even though the school had forcefully become a 'government school', the United Sisterhood still owned the school buildings and the land on which the school was built.

Before Rabbi Weiler left South Africa on 1 January 1958, he visited the school to say goodbye to the 650 children. At a moving





Photo: Darryl Egnal

*Children from the MC Weiler School at the 60th Anniversary*

ceremony, these underprivileged children handed Rabbi Weiler £40, which they had collected for him. Deeply touched, Rabbi Weiler acknowledged this wonderful gesture and then handed the money back to the children as a gift.

Despite the fact that the Sisterhood had to give up the official administration of the school, the buildings were leased to the government and the income was used to sponsor the feeding scheme, clothing scheme, library, end-of-year parties and prize-giving.

The new library opened in 1960 and the function was attended by many, including the then Mayoress of Johannesburg, Mrs Dave Marais.

The 16th birthday of the school was celebrated at the end of 1961. On this occasion, the soccer team was fitted out with new soccer shorts and sufficient fabric for new school dresses for the girls was supplied by the Sisterhood.

By 1963, the number of pupils had risen to 800 and there was a staff of 11 teachers, still under the diligent supervision of Hilda Phahle. Although the school was now administered by the Bantu Education Department, the Sisterhood continued to supplement the teacher's salaries. Jerry Idelson, one of the founding members of the Progressive Jewish Movement in South Africa, spent many hours teaching the children new songs and training the choir. It was Jerry who composed the music for the MC Weiler School song, with the words written by Hilda. This song is still sung by the children today.

### Adam and Gideon Weiler Scholarship

When Rabbi Weiler's son, Major Adam Weiler, died in defence of Israel, the United Sisterhood decided to establish a scholarship in his honour. This scholarship was awarded to the top pupil leaving the MC Weiler School to continue with higher education. The first recipient to receive a seven-year scholarship was Ezekiel Cebekhulu.

In 1983, the United Sisterhood changed the name of the scholarship fund to include the name of Major Gideon Weiler in order to honour Rabbi Weiler's second son to die in defence of Israel.

### Feeding Scheme

"You cannot educate a hungry child" has always been the motto of the United Sisterhood, and since 1945, the Feeding Scheme at the school has always been a priority. The Feeding Scheme has now been running for 60 years with very few interruptions despite many

difficulties.

During the years when permits were required by white people to enter black residential areas, these permits were sometimes denied, and at other times, the unrest and violence made it too dangerous for our volunteers to enter the township. Despite all these problems, the United Sisterhood never abandoned the Feeding Scheme or the school, often at great personal danger to the volunteers.

### And now, into the future

In 1996, many shacks in the area were demolished and the learners allocated to different schools. This initially caused a fall in the number of learners, but this has now risen again. In 1996, the school catered for learners from Grade 1 to Grade 4 and about 890 were educated. In 2004, three extra classes were added, and over 1000 learners are now taught from Grade R to Grade 6.

In November 2005, the MC Weiler School celebrated its 60th anniversary, and the opening of the new kitchen, which would replace the inadequate storeroom, which was being used to prepare food. This will not only be used for the hygienic preparation of food, but also as a 'teaching centre' to give women of the township the necessary skills to earn a living by baking.

The United Sisterhood continues to nourish the seeds planted by Rabbi Weiler, his wife, Una, and Rita Marx. And the Rabbi's legacy will live on in the hearts and minds of all those whose lives were touched by this remarkable man.

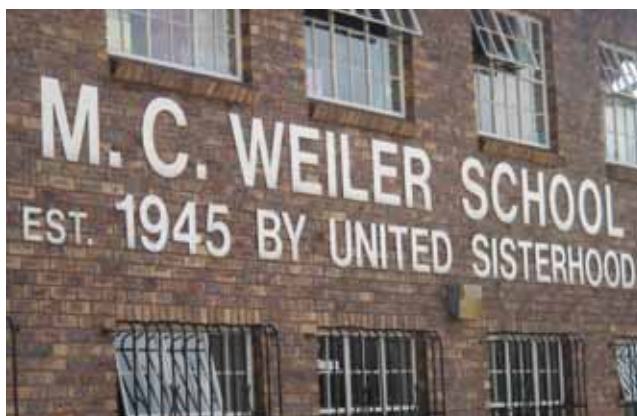


Photo: Rabbi Zach Shapiro



TEMPLE ISRAEL HOSTS MAAFRIKA TIKKUN CRÈCHE

MaAfrika Tikkun was established in 1995 as a foundation to make a difference in the lives of underprivileged South Africans through empowering communities to uplift themselves. MaAfrika Tikkun has projects running throughout South Africa.

MaAfrika Tikkun's Hillbrow Project – a creche – is based at Temple Israel in Hillbrow. MaAfrika Tikkun supplies this project with equipment for the school and training for its teachers, and the children are taken on various outings during the year.

According to the *MaAfrika Tikkun Times, a Review of 2004*, the school is now fully recognised by the government and a parents' association has been established.

"MaAfrika Tikkun donates blankets, food and clothing to the Hillbrow street children and, twice a year, hosts parties for about 200 children."

Former president, Nelson Mandela, is the 'patron-in-chief' of MaAfrika Tikkun. Other patrons include Gill Marcus, Raymond Ackerman, Eric Ellerne, Bridgette Radebe, Cyril Ramaphosa, Ronnie & Bertie Lubner and many more. It's chief executive officer is Herby Rosenberg.

"In the early days, MaAfrika Tikkun was approached to develop projects that would assist disadvantaged and impoverished communities in a variety of ways," says the review.

"Experience has taught us to focus on the particular fields of expertise in which we excel. These include: skills development; pre-school education and development of creches; day-care for the elderly and renovation of homes; primary health care and support with the emphasis on assistance to HIV/AIDS-affected patients and their families; home economic skills training, including computer literacy and instructor training; taking care of orphans and vulnerable children; and feeding schemes for vulnerable groupings; among others."

MaAfrika Tikkun's emphasis lies in upliftment and personal development of underprivileged communities, acknowledging that handouts are not long-term solutions to the disadvantaged.



Reeva Forman, Chairperson Temple Israel and Amy Harris, Chair of Projects

**Hillbrow Project**

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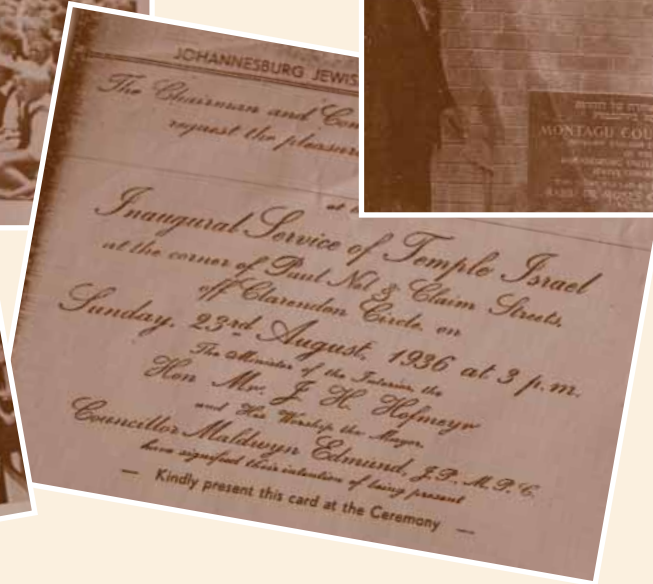
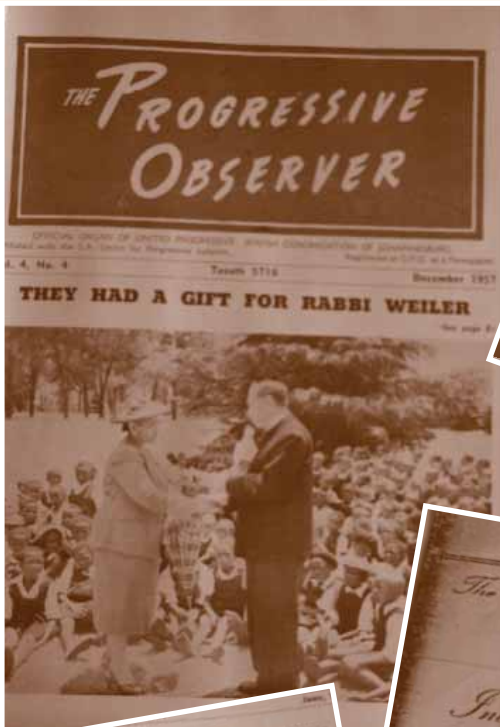
year, hosts parties for about 200 children. The Hillbrow Adult Education began with literacy and sewing classes and future plans include the amalgamation with the Oxford Synagogue Skills for Adults Centre (OSSAC), which will include classes on computer skills.



Recognising achievement at Temple Israel

# ARCHIVES

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## World renowned Rabbi comes to Temple Israel

Rabbi Sjalom Awraham Soetendorp's resumé reads like a book. He is well-known internationally for his research and expertise in the field of interfaith and world ecology. He was chairman of the Dutch Solidarity Committee for Soviet Jewry, and was a key figure in helping to improve the situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union.

Rabbi Soetendorp is the guest Rabbi at Temple Israel's 70th Anniversary celebrations and the SAUPJ conference.

He is a board member of Green Cross International and chairman of Green Cross Netherlands. In 1998, he founded and chaired the 'Hope Foundation for Children' aimed at providing primary education for those deprived of this basic human right. The concept introduced by this Foundation: "Every individual should give an extra 0,1% of his or her own income and/or pension fund reserve," received wide support from Dutch society.

Rabbi Soetendorp's areas of expertise include Judeo-Christian

relations; Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and other spiritual traditions; Jews in the former Soviet Union; the language of prayer after the Shoah; anti-semitism and the responsibility of Christianity in modern times; rebuilding European Jewish communities; working with youth and students; Tikun Olam – combatting poverty towards global education; and many more. He is a member of the UNESCO committee working towards a new charter of global ethics.

He has written many books for adults and children, including *Children of Abraham*, which was co-authored by Muslim and Christian religious leaders, and *The Breath of Children*, a book of stories about the Jewish holidays.

Rabbi Soetendorp is also a board member of the Anne Frank Foundation in Amsterdam; president of the European board of the World Union for Progressive Judaism; chairman of the World Fellowship of Progressive Rabbis; and co-chair of the Global Forum for Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival New York.

Rabbi Soetendorp lives in The Hague, Netherlands, with his wife, Sira, and they have two children, Tamar and Penina.

## Hero for Justice

Justice Arthur Chaskalson, former chief justice of South Africa, is a man who holds freedom, justice and human rights close to his heart. He is the guest speaker at the Temple Israel 70th anniversary celebrations on Saturday 22 July 2006.

Arthur Chaskalson was admitted to the Johannesburg Bar in May 1956 and took silk in July 1971. During his career at the Bar, he appeared as counsel for members of the liberation movements in several major political trials, including the Rivonia Treason Trial, which led to the conviction and imprisonment of Nelson Mandela and other leaders of the African National Congress. He also appeared in major commercial disputes.

In 1978, he helped establish the Legal Resources Centre, a non-profit organisation that seeks to use the law to pursue justice and human rights in South Africa. He was its director from November 1978 until September 1993, and was leading counsel in several cases in which the centre launched challenges against apartheid laws. Chaskalson held many important positions over the past 40 years, some of which include:

- S chairman of the Johannesburg Bar in 1976 and again in 1982;
- S a member of the board of the Faculty of Law of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) from 1979 to 1999;
- S a member of the National Council of Lawyers for Human Rights from 1980 to 1991; and
- S chairman of the Rhodes Scholarship Selection Committee for South Africa from 1988 to 1993.

Chaskalson was elected an honorary member of the Bar Association of the City of New York in 1985, of the Boston Bar

Association in 1991 and of the Johannesburg Bar in 2002.

South Africa selected him to be one of its four members of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 1999. In 2001, he was appointed by the United Nations as an *ad hoc* judge of the Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

Chaskalson was a consultant to the Namibian Constituent Assembly in connection with the drafting of the Constitution of Namibia (in 1989 and 1990); a consultant to the ANC on constitutional issues (1990 to 1994); and served as a member of the Technical Committee on Constitutional Issues – appointed by the Multiparty Negotiating Forum in May 1993 to give it advice and to draft the Interim Constitution.

In June 1994, then President Nelson Mandela appointed Chaskalson the first president of South Africa's new Constitutional Court. On 22 November 2001, he became the chief justice of South Africa, and last year, at 74, he retired from this position.

### Other activities

Chaskalson was awarded the degrees of Doctor of Laws Honoris Causa by the University of Natal in 1986; the University of the Witwatersrand in 1990; Rhodes University in 1997; the University of Amsterdam in 2002; Port Elizabeth University in 2002; and the University of South Africa in 2004.

He received the Premier Group Award for prestigious service by a member of the Faculty of Law at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1983; the Claude Harris Leon Foundation Award for Community Service; and the Wits Alumni Honour Award for exceptional service to the community, both in 1984.

He was the joint recipient (with Dr S Magoba) of the Human Rights Award of the Foundation for Freedom and Human Rights in Switzerland in 1990. He has received awards for his work in the promotion of



human rights from the General Council of the Bar of South Africa (the Sydney and Felicia Kentridge award in 2001); from Lawyers for Human Rights in South Africa; and from the Jewish Board of Deputies. He is the joint recipient, with deputy chief justice Pius Langa, of the 2004 Justice Prize of the Peter Gruber Foundation.

In December 2002, he received the award of Supreme Counsellor of the Baobab (gold), a national honour, for his service to the nation in constitutionalism, human rights and democracy.

Chaskalson is married to Dr Lorraine Chaskalson and they have two children, Matthew and Jerome.

Source: [www.concourt.gov.za](http://www.concourt.gov.za)



# SPONSORS

We would like to thank the following who have most generously contributed to the refurbishment or renovation of Temple Israel.

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Tel: 011 484 7559

**Jenclean**  
Jenni & James Mac Pherson  
Carpet cleaners  
Tel: 011 616 1085

**Jimnettes Art Glass**  
Stephan Scheepers  
1 Long Ave, Glenhazel  
Tel: 011 887 5875

**MaAfrika Tikkun**  
Herby Rosenberg  
PO Box 895  
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Tel: 011 325 5914

**Promtex Wooden Floors**  
Director: Inge Ince  
Cell: 082 881 0628

**Ravat's Persian Carpet Gallery**  
Persian Carpets  
Director: Majida Ravat  
Tel: 012 666 8998

**Royal Coat Contractors**  
Director: Mike Victor  
PO Box 1026  
Fontainbleau, 2032  
Tel: 011 792 1065

**Selwyn Miller Nurseries**  
Director: Selwyn Miller  
Tel: 011 608 4028

**Universal Waterproofing cc**  
Des Tintingur & partners  
PO Box 751555  
Gardenview, 1247  
Tel: 011 615 3888

**Vaal Potteries Bathroom Fixtures**  
Director: Geraad Deeb & partners  
Tel: 061 360 6015

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Regional director  
Inner city of Joahhnesburg Region

**Martin New**  
Head of the inner city task force

**Lael Bethlehem**  
Chief executive officer  
Johannesburg Development Agency

**Pikitup**

**Parks Board**

**Johannesburg Water**

**City Power**

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**Temple Emanuel Rabbi's Fund**

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**Stan Abrahams**

**World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ)**

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