As I Lived It

Irma Miriam Lopes Cardozo



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In memory of

MY BELOVED HUSBAND

ABRAHAM LOPES CARDOZO Z"L ,

NE'IM ZEMIROT YISRAEL,

SWEET SINGER IN ISRAEL,

WITH WHOM I SHARED A WONDERFUL LIFE;



MY DEAR PARENTS

JUDAH ROBLES AND

JULIE TZIPPORAH FERNANDES ROBLES Z"L

IN WHOSE FOOTSTEPS I WALK;

AND

MY OLDEST BROTHER **EPHRAIM ROBLES** Z"L,

WHO HAD A HEART OF GOLD.



In honor of

MY BELOVED BROTHER AND SISTERS,

TIZKU LEHAIM TOBIM,

MAY YOU ENJOY GOOD HEALTHY LIVES.

ABOUT THE COVER:

The author as a young girl in Suriname, wearing a *kotomiese* costume.
Kotomiese were Creole Indian girls dressed up in festive dress for market day.

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Acknowledgements

My gratitude to the Almighty for all He has done and continues to do for me. It has been a privilege to serve Him and I pray for the strength to continue for many years in good health.



This book could not have been possible without the help of my two wonderful daughters, Debby and Judy, who worked day and night to organize my thoughts and words into book form. Thank you Ruthie, Gloria and Judith for your encouragement and helpful suggestions. Special thanks to Julie Farkas, our gifted graphic designer.



Family is the greatest blessing. I am most grateful for, and to, the lights of my life:

My beloved daughters and sons-in-law—Debby and Earl, Judy and Sid; my dearest grandchildren: Yossi, Deena, Zvia Nechamah, Ari-Lev, Elie, Avichai, Yitzhak Menachem and Chana Tziporah; and my precious great-grandson, Nathan:

May your lives be filled with blessings, happiness and success.

Author's Note

The original title of this book was "Irma Tells All." My late husband, Bram, of blessed memory, encouraged me because he knew the project infused me with a sense of purpose. Bram himself would never have written a "Bram Tells All." He believed that certain things were better left unsaid.

My wise daughters, who are my editors, agree with Bram. And so this book is a much-edited version of my life story. Its purpose is to capture people and places, some long gone; and to show how, with G-d's help and determination, a person can accomplish many things.

I had many hurdles to overcome. I came to this country without money, had no higher education and had no family to help me. I was Orthodox but had no yeshivah education.

My husband and I struggled financially. Still, we proudly paid all our bills on time and never took any payment or reward for our charitable work. We had a tiny apartment and yet entertained many guests. We both had "accents." For years, even when we held leadership positions, this was cause enough not to be asked to speak in public. Despite these obstacles, we continued to help others. If one wills it, one can achieve virtually anything!

To those who I have failed to mention in this book, please excuse the oversight of an old lady. I hope that my story will be interesting and perhaps even inspirational to you, dear reader.

Irma Miriam Lopes Cardozo
(nee Robles de Medina)
Tu B'Shvat, 5770
January 2010

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Preface

As is true for every Jew, my personal story is a link in a chain reaching back across time to our ancestors Abraham and Sarah and across the world to Jewish people everywhere. After being exiled from our Biblical homeland, my family found refuge in Spain. The rich Jewish life that blossomed there ended with the Inquisition in 1492. Hundreds of thousand of Jews left and were scattered across the globe. Others stayed and hid their Jewish identity. These secret Jews risked disclosure, public trial and burning at the stake. Many of these families gradually lost connection to their Jewish ancestry and became part of the Catholic Spanish population. Those who held on to their identity as Jews eventually found their way to friendlier shores.

My family was one of those who maintained its Jewish identity. Records indicate that my ancestor, Mosseh Robles de Medina, who was born in Granada, Spain in 1695, arrived in my birthplace Suriname, Dutch Guyana, in 1730. He was married to Rachel d'Anavia, who was also born in Spain. They had four children: a girl and boy were born in Granada; a boy, Jacob, was born in 1721 in

Lisbon, Portugal; and a boy was born in Suriname. The Inquisition had uprooted them from their ancestral home and sent them wandering until they found a safe haven in Suriname, a far-flung Jewish community at the edge of the rain forest.

My family's original name was Robles de Medina. In the 19th century, there was a rift in the family. Several members had children with non-Jewish women; these non-Jewish children now bore the family's special name. Those who had remained loyal to Judaism asked that these children use another last name. When these family members refused, our branch of the family retained only the Robles portion of the name.

Many generations have passed. I would like to reclaim my family's full name, Robles de Medina, in tribute to my ancestors. Despite living in perhaps the most remote of all Jewish communities, these remarkable individuals held on tenaciously and faithfully to our Jewish beliefs and way of life. It is because of them that I am here today, to tell my story.



1

In the Beginning

I was born on Wagenwegstraat in Paramaribo, Suriname on February 25, 1924 and lived there for the first twenty-one years of my life. My given name was Irma—supposedly after a schoolteacher who my mother saw passing the house after my birth—and my Hebrew name was Miriam. My parents, Judah Robles and Julie Fernandes-Robles, had five children: three girls and two boys. My brother Ewald (Efraim) was the eldest. He was adorable, smart and, as was common in those days, was indulged as the *bekhor*, the first-born son. Dorine (Sarah) was the next in line, then me, then Jules (Yehudah—named after my father, as is the Sephardic tradition) and four years later the baby of the family, Letitia (Leah).

In this big lively family, I was very much the middle child. I was given many responsibilities, but rarely got the privileges accorded the oldest or as much attention as the youngest. Although I sometimes felt squashed, I benefited from this middle position. It planted my feet solidly in reality and gave me a good perspective on situations. Ultimately, with G-d's guidance, it directed me to make good choices in my life.

The Robles Family

At the time of his death, twenty-eight years before my birth, my grandfather Itzhak Robles left the family with two big stores, the *"Gunst"* and *"Vlijt."* The store named *"Gunst"* (Graciousness) carried jewelry and *"Vlijt"* (Diligence) carried crystal and earthenware. These were well-known stores in Suriname, and therefore we were known as the "*Familie Robles Gunst en Vlijt.*" My grandfather passed away of a kidney infection when he was only thirty-nine years old. His wife, my Oma Rachel, was left with seven small children including my father Judah, the only boy, who was eight years old at the time. It was not an easy task for my grandmother to bring these children up. As if widowhood wasn't enough, the executor of the estate and guardian of the children—a close relative—helped himself to money.

With a strong sense of responsibility that was always to characterize him, at the age of sixteen my father went to work to provide for his mother, whom he adored, and all of his sisters. Even when he had established his own family, his beloved mother, Oma Rachel, lived only a few houses away. He took care of her and stood by her through all her difficult times. The morning before she died, she got out of bed and gave a special blessing to my father and mother. I can still remember how my father wept.

My father's sisters are each a story unto themselves: Tante Joosje married John da Costa. John had many troubles at his workplace. At some point early in their marriage, he was in fear of his life and had to be smuggled out of Suriname in a box. My father, who was still living in his mother's home at the time, took his sister and her three children into the house and cared for them in her husband's absence. After many years John returned from America, where he had made a fortune with the Shell Oil Company. In Suriname he came to be known as the "Oil Lord," and became very aloof from all those family members who had helped him in his difficult days.

Tante Esther married David Ezekiel Robles. This was not a simple pairing. Many years before there had been a disagreement between my grandfather and the Ezekiel Robles family. My grandfather vowed that no member of his family would marry into *that* family. Despite the vow, the marriage took place, but it ended tragically when Tante Esther died while giving birth to a little girl named Betsy. David's subsequent marriage to Esther's younger sister also ended tragically; she died shortly after they married. He then married Julie Nassy with whom he had three children.

Tante Julie married Henry Nahar, who drowned in a boating accident. (This was particularly eerie because the word "*nahar*" in Hebrew means river.) Tante Jacqueline ("Lientje") never married, but made her presence known nonetheless. She lived with her mother until the last day of her mother's life. In the year that followed her mother's passing, she cried incessantly. Tante Rachel married Yaacob De Barrios and they had twins: Corrie and Anita.

My mother, Julie Fernandes, married my father when she was only nineteen years old. It was then that "our Nina" came to work for our parents as a housekeeper. Nina's real name was Kathleen Prescott and she came from Barbados. She immediately became part of the family and lived with us for close to sixty years, until the day she died. When she marked her fiftieth year in our household, the Queen of Holland awarded her a special citation and medallion. Besides serving as a second mother to us, Nina was a lot of fun. Sometimes we would be sitting around the table and all the children would start laughing without a stop. I would then say one crazy word and Nina would laugh so much that she had to leave the room. My parents could not understand what was so funny and often sent us all to different rooms until we calmed down. Whenever we had problems or needed advice or money, our Nina was always there for us.

The Fernandes Family

Our maternal grandparents Fernandes lived in the Heerenstraat, only a few blocks away from our home. Opa Jacob was a jeweler and worked very hard for his living. He came from a family of five children; the boys were named Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the girls, Malina and Matela. Because of their hearty appetites and big statures the Fernandeses were called "*biggie Jews*" in the local *Taki taki* dialect. Our parents made it a habit to walk every evening to visit them. There was always plenty of food in their home and their coffee cups were three times as big as mugs. My grandfather attended our synagogue, the Portuguese (Sephardic) one, until he tired of fighting with some of the people in the community. In the end he preferred to go to the Ashkenazic synagogue to avoid the aggravation.

Oma Helene was an intelligent lady and an excellent cook. I remember very well her duck with wine, prunes and apricots; there was always a feast waiting for us when we visited them on Sundays. Opa Jacob would not shave his beard immediately after Shabbat or *Yom Tob* and would give us a "face rubbing." We would scream with delight and have a lot of fun.

Tact was never my strong point. My grandmother used to wear a beautiful antique pin that I always admired. She always said that I would inherit it after she passed on. One day I asked her, "Why don't you give it to me now?" When my mother heard me say this I got a good licking.



My mother's parents had five children: my mother Julie, a brother, David, and three sisters: Estelle, Betsy, and Elizabeth. Tante

Elizabeth died of pneumonia at age 30. I was seven years old at the time but will never forget her funeral. She died on a Friday and was buried after Shabbat. The *begrafenis* (burial) was very late at night and I can still hear the cloppety-clop of the horses that pulled the hearse with her coffin. The people walked alongside in the darkness with lanterns. I still shudder thinking of this eerie scene.

Oom David moved to Venezuela but moved back to Suriname in his parents' lifetime. He died at the young age of fifty. Estelle and Betsy married non-Jews, something that sadly had become more common in the Jewish community at this time. Tante Estelle married Joe Zaal. They had many gambling parties that ensnared many members of the Jewish community, including close family members. Tante Betsy married Jacques Buth, a non-Jewish government employee, who gambled heavily with the Chinese people in the city.

Aside from blood relatives, I was closely connected to many other people within our small Jewish community. One of my favorites was Tante Elly, who married Hans Fernandes (not a relative) in Holland. They came back to Suriname and Hans worked with the *Luciferfabrik* (match factory) "Snakebite" and also worked in the family's "*Gelukige Dag*" (Lucky Day) store. Tante Elly Fernandes-Benjamins was a concert pianist with a degree from the Amsterdam Conservatory. She was the first person I knew who grew up outside of Suriname, and being with this wise and wonderful woman was like a breath of fresh air. Tante Elly's was a place I could always go to when I just needed to talk and speak my mind.

School Days

My parents worked hard to give us the best education available in Suriname. As little children we went to the Conradi School, a nursery and kindergarten for children from good homes. After that we

went to the Hendrik School. School hours were from eight until one, Monday through Friday. In the afternoons, we received piano lessons from Sister Josefie, a lively nun with a beautiful voice. We also were given religious instruction on Sundays from Mr. Hartog Levy. On Jewish holidays, we had special permission to be absent; everybody respected that and there was never any problem.

I was a bit naughty in school. I remember taking Janny Abercrombie's sandwiches and distributing them to other kids in the class. He was a good friend of mine and we liked to play tricks on each other. One day, a girl sitting behind me was asked by the teacher to leave the room for disrupting the lesson. I was sitting in front of her and whispered to her: "Don't go. Ask for a real explanation." After she asked him a few times at my urging, the teacher ran to her bench, grabbed her by the hair and dragged her out. I nearly collapsed from laughter at seeing Mr. Schoonhoven lose his cool.

The next victim of our shenanigans was Mr. De Groot, a teacher from Holland, who always wore a white suit. One day, as he faced the blackboard to explain something, one of the boys quickly painted his seat red. After he sat down and got up again, the class yelled in rhyme: *"Mr. De Groot. Je broek is root!"* ("Mr. De Groot, your pants are red.") Mr. De Groot had hoped to leave school at one o'clock, after everybody had left, so that no one would see his red-stained pants. The prankster stayed behind and taunted him by yelling, *"Mr. De Groot. Je broek is root!"* Mr. De Groot jumped off his bike and gave the boy a beating.

Home Life

For many years, my father worked as a foreman for an American firm in the *balata* industry. Grown in the rainforest, *balata* is a rubber-like plant that was used to insulate underwater cables. My

father often had to travel into the jungle for days at a time and sometimes had to go over a waterfall in a little boat. He came back from these excursions exhausted. Once he came down with yellow fever, a very dangerous tropical disease.

Mostly, my father oversaw work nearer to home. Every afternoon at one o'clock all my father's workers would come to the house to give account of what had occurred that morning and what had yet to be done. My father respected the men who worked for him and would not sit down for his warm midday meal until Nina assured him that his workers had eaten. One afternoon, one of my father's most trusted and beloved workers—Bita—had to move a very heavy safe to another office. When he did not return, my father went to check on him. To my father's horror, Bita died right before his eyes. My father was so shaken by Bita's death that he took ill. My mother took him to the country to recuperate, but he never fully recovered from this episode.

On a more humorous note: A man who was bothering my father for all kinds of crazy things came to the door one day and demanded to see him. My father instructed my little sister "Titia" to tell the man that he was asleep. Having overheard the conversation, the man got very angry and shouted: " I can hear that your father speaks very well in his sleep."

Helpers

Although we were not rich, we had several people to help in our home. Domestic help in Suriname was very inexpensive. A cleaning woman came every day from eight till six. On Mondays a woman came to do the laundry. Monday was also pea soup day; Rosa Agsteribbe would come with the *wurst* that would go into the soup.

A dressmaker or our mother made most of our clothing, sailor suits for the boys and dresses for the girls.

Our gardener, a Japanese man named Ahmad, was considered a member of our household. He cleaned the garden and the trenches and was very loyal to us. Once while he was assisting my father in building the *cabanah (succah)* in the yard of our synagogue, he slipped and fell from the roof. My father was beside himself with worry. Ahmad was badly hurt, but after a week in the hospital and with the love and support of our family, he recovered.

Every week an Indian man came to our house selling live chickens. He stood downstairs and never came up the long stairway. He would yell: *"Vrouw Boven! Koop kip"*—"Lady Upstairs! Buy Chicken!" He quoted a high price and my mother always bargained with him from the window until she got the chickens for less than half the price he originally asked. The chickens ran around the yard for few days, until we called Mr. Abrams, the *shohet*, to ready them for our Shabbat soup.

Neighbors

A high level of mutual respect characterized the close interaction between the helpers and our family. There were times that non-Jewish people living in our neighborhood, especially blacks, came to my mother to pray for a sick member of their family. They placed great value on Judaism and the Jewish people. They believed strongly in the *ayin harah*, the evil eye. If they were convinced that their ailment was the result of the "evil eye" they would come to my mother, ask her to make a concoction of water mixed with blue dye and say a few prayers. When she threw the water out, they hoped the illness would be purged along with it.

Before Kippur, the holiest day of the year, a charity box was placed at the street entrance of the *esnoga* (synagogue in Portuguese). Many non-Jewish people from the area passed by and put money inside, wrapped in notes saying, "G-d bless the People of Israel." Some of them had Jewish ancestors who had intermarried.

There was an old woman from a slave family who knew when the Jewish holidays were. She would come up the front stairs of our house to collect food that Nina had set aside for her on a regular basis. On Succot she asked for bread blessed in the *succah* and on Pesach she wanted some *matzah* and *haroset.*



Mutual respect also characterized the relations between religions in Suriname. The Alberga family lived in the house next to ours. They were very active in the Salvation Army. Dominee Dirk Mulder and his wife were our neighbors two houses down. He was a Protestant minister who was very interested in all religions and cultures. He made many recordings of music of various native groups in Suriname. I remember how he came over after Dorine went to the *mikveh* before her marriage; he was impressed with the festivities at home that followed. Later, Dominee Mulder became a close friend and colleague of my future husband Bram Cardozo. (When Bram learned of the fate of his family in Holland, it was Dominee Mulder who extended his hand in friendship. Bram spent many hours pouring out his heart to this compassionate man in a way he felt he couldn't to members of his own flock. Years later, after they moved to Holland, we visited them and stayed in regular contact.)

On the topic of neighbors: We lived across the street from a non-Jewish cemetery. My mother was often asked whether this bothered

her. She always answered that the dead actually made very good neighbors. They were peaceful, they didn't look into your house, and they never made any trouble.

Mama Goes to Holland

My little sister Letitia was born in 1930. Shortly after her birth the doctor told my mother that she needed to undergo several operations. My mother suffered from hernias that were aggravated after each birth. At that time, there was only one surgeon in Suriname; under his knife many people died. My father pleaded with my mother to go to Holland to have the operation. After long deliberations she consented to go, but was terribly worried about what would happen to her five children. Letitia was only nine months old. I was six. Back then, there were no airplanes flying to Holland; she had to travel by sea, a voyage that lasted eighteen days.

My mother left us in the excellent care of our Papa and our unforgettable Nina. My mother was away for nine months. The love and care Papa and Nina gave us we could not ever repay. There was not a single day when they left us unattended or alone. Nina slept in our room to make sure that we were safe.

During my mother's stay in the Netherlands, she met many interesting people and she fell in love with Holland and the European way of life. She proposed to my father that we move to Holland. She believed that from a Jewish point of view and otherwise it would best decision for all of us. My father did not want to even think about moving away from his mother; as long as she was alive, he would stay in Suriname. Thank G-d for his loyalty to his mother; otherwise we would have fallen into the clutches of Hitler.

A Difficult Homecoming

My mother came back from Holland and brought with her the most beautiful linen, crystal and silver to be used in our household. Unfortunately, her long-awaited homecoming was greeted with bad news: my father lost his senior position with the American firm he had been working with for many years because of the Great Depression. Even worse, her younger sister Elizabeth had just died of pneumonia at the age of thirty. My mother joined her parents and two sisters, Estelle and Betsy, in sitting *shivah* for this young woman who had passed away in the prime of her life.

An Entrepreneurial Spirit

These sudden changes in my parents' life put them face to face with very difficult decisions. They had five children in school who were growing up and would need to be given the tools to stand on their own; this meant constantly increasing expenses. Without a moment's hesitation, my parents opened up the big dining room table and displayed all the beautiful objects that my mother had brought back from Holland. By word of mouth the news traveled fast and many people, among them government officials, came to our house to buy the goods, and put in orders for more. In the meantime, my mother had made contact with some manufacturers in Holland and arranged to be their agent. The goods were of superb quality.

My mother, with the help of Nina, baked cakes and cookies and served these to those who came to shop, along with a cup of coffee and tea. Very soon she had a big catering business going. People didn't come only to shop, but also to order cakes and other foods. At Christmastime, the nuns would order special raisin bread and cake. My mother could not have done all of this without Nina, who

worked with her day and night. In the yard we had a stone wood-burning oven. Cakes would be positioned in the oven and removed using a huge wooden paddle. It was a physically grueling job but Nina was more than happy to help and never complained.



When my mother had big jobs, such as delivering food to clients, she called on us kids to assist her. My brother Jules helped to beat the eggs for cake in a *krapie*, a big earthenware bowl. My mother constantly asked him to do this job because he was very good at it. Whenever my mother had a small delivery to make, she would ask either Jules or me to go on our bike to deliver the package. It was sometimes embarassing, because many times I had to bring the package to the home of one of my friends; we had to do it because it was the only way we could help. I was always upbeat; my mother used to say: "When I see Irma coming around the corner on her bike, or running up the stairs, I forget all my problems."



My father was on a very strict diet for what they then called his "thick blood" condition. In those days, it was treated with leeches. My father often needed these blood-letting sessions. Despite doctor's orders, he loved cake and did whatever he could to sneak a few pieces. When my mother had orders for cakes, she would put them on the dining room table before delivering them. My father would come in quietly and snatch an entire cake. We children, seeing what he had done, would prance through the house singing: *"Hola, hola."* He would give us each a good chunk of cake in exchange for our

silence. Each time, my mother had to go back to the kitchen to bake a new cake.

With all that was going on at home, it was extremely hard for my father to find the right job to keep our household going. Most of the money he had saved went straight into my mother's operation and her stay in Holland. The Fernandes family—Phili, Coen and Hans—were always very good friends of our family. Despite the name they shared with my mother, we were not closely related. They grew up with my parents, and our families knew each other for many years. Later on, they were to provide me with a home away from home in New York. One evening, Phili and Coen came to our house to talk to my parents. They had a proposition for my father. Because they had been childhood friends they were reluctant to offer him the menial job of managing their properties, collecting rent, taking care of repairs etc., but under the circumstances they felt they must. My father, for his part, had no choice but to accept the offer, even though it paid poorly.

In his new job as rent collector, my father had to deal with all kinds of people. The tenants who lived in the houses owned by Phili Fernandes were very poor and had many children; they had no means of paying their rent on the first day of the month. As my father was working on commission (only five cents to the guilder), it was very important for his own *parnasah* (livelihood) to receive the rent on time. He would go to these people's homes and when he saw their misery, he would dig into his own pocket and give them a few guilders to feed and clothe their children. Many times he also had to be firm, and this made for lots of problems. The tenants would come to our house with knives; my mother would send one of us to intercept my father before he arrived home and tell him to go take a detour to visit my sister Dorine, who was already married to Harry Emanuels and lived a few blocks away. My father would

stay there until everything calmed down and only then would he come home.

In the meantime my mother could not handle the store out of our home anymore; it was getting out of hand and becoming too complicated. She had good contacts in Holland and it was time to expand. My father's brother-in-law John da Costa, who was married to my aunt Josephine, was wealthy. He was the Director of Shell Oil in Suriname. My father suggested to my mother that she take John on as a partner and open a very elegant store in the Domineestraat, at one of his properties. In the beginning, all went well and business was good. But after a few years things went sour, and arguments were the order of the day. In the end it became impossible, and my parents decided to give up the business and settle the finances with him. That created a rift in the family. My father loved his sister and her children, but wanted nothing more to do with Johnny. My mother went back to cooking and baking for people and once again by word of mouth people came to place their orders. My father worked day and night at the Fernandes property management job, but this was not work he enjoyed. He had to do all kinds of menial tasks, and traveled from one place to another on his bicycle in the blazing tropical sun.



To earn much-needed extra money, every year from November through the secular New Year my parents used to have a "St. Nicolaas" store in the city together with Phili Fernandes. In Holland and in Dutch colonies such as Suriname, the December 5-6th St. Nicolaas holiday, like the American Thanksgiving, marks the official beginning of the Christmas season. The story is told that St. Nicolaas came from Spain with his helper Pieter Baas—a little black

boy—who carried gifts for the children. Our St. Nicolaas store sold toys and ornaments. My parents also once managed a "kilo" store; this was a new retail innovation and it soon became the talk of the town. All the goods were sold by the kilo; it was a very interesting idea, and the store was always full. People would buy a piece of material and they wouldn't pay by length but by the kilo. We, the children, had to help in both enterprises. We served customers and patrolled the aisles to make sure people did not steal. My mother instructed us to have *"twee ogen op een hand"*—two eyes watching one hand! Later on, my sister Dorine, having the same entrepreneurial spirit, opened a store with novelties in Suriname. When I was living in America, I would go down to the wholesale district in Manhattan to buy merchandise for her in my free time.

My brother Ewald also had many good business ideas. At this time, he set up a wine factory in a little shack in my parents' yard. My very capable mother did all the work—overseeing the man who came to prepare the wine as well as all the business administration. The product was called "Fluctomel" and was very well received. He made a fortune, but lost it all.



Earning a living was a great struggle for my parents and many people at this time. They worked hard and lived within their means. This was not the case for everyone. There were many who lost fortunes in gambling and other questionable financial schemes. About seventy years ago, members of our little Suriname Jewish community suffered at the hands of what today are called con men and Ponzi schemers.

There were two notaries in Paramaribo. Many Jewish people had invested their money with them and earned remarkably high interest. Many Jewish organizations and synagogues also invested money with them. All the money disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Phili Samson, who was a friend of the family and an important judge, overheard rumors about the bankruptcy and went home and told his wife and sister-in-law to immediately take their money out of this fund. They were caught acting on this insider information, and with great shame, he was disbarred. His wife Annie and her sister Erna caused him much grief. He took it very much to heart. I was already living in America at the time and heard that he had come to New York to try to get back to himself. He stayed with Bram in his apartment and was lonesome and depressed. Since I knew him from childhood, I helped out and cooked special meals for him (he was a vegetarian) and kept him company when he was down.



Amidst their own problems, my parents took on the burdens of others. My mother was once visiting the hospital where she chanced upon Nina's sister, who was a patient. My mother sat with her and listened as she shared her fears of dying. She made my mother promise that if she died, my mother would take care of her son Oswald. My mother promised, never thinking that death was imminent. She died a few days later and true to her word, my amazing parents took Oswald into the house. Oswald was treated as a full member of the family. True, he was not Jewish, but whatever we ate he ate and whatever clothes we received he received.

In his late teens, Oswald befriended someone in the neighborhood who he started to visit often. The mother of this friend started a relationship with him. This woman thought we were rich and demanded that Oswald give her money. Having none, he came to regularly open my father's safe and took money when no one was home. I had just cashed my first paycheck and put the proceeds away in the safe for the weekend; the next morning it was gone. After pondering how to confront him, we caught him in the act; he had to leave our home immediately. For our Nina this was an enormous blow; she was terribly embarrassed and upset and never spoke to her nephew again.



Nicknames in Suriname

In Suriname, the official language is Dutch and the secondary language is *Taki-taki* ("talk-talk" or "say-say"), or *Ningre-tongo* ("blacks' tongue"). It is a lively admixture of Dutch, English, Hebrew and French.

As is typical in most small communities, people in Suriname created nicknames for one another. There were many different families with the same last name; nicknames helped distinguish one from the other. For example, there were several Fernandes families: Dr. Fernandes was known as *"Doctor Blacka Japon"*—the doctor with the black "dress" or coat. There was the *"Fernandes Coca-Cola"* family who owned the bottling plant. Pauline Fernandes was known as *"Pautje Pindakaas"* (little Pauline Peanut Butter) and her family was known as *"Fernandes Pinda Kassie."* There was the *"Fernandes Gelukige Dag"* family who owned a store called *"Gelukige Dag"*—

Your Lucky Day. My mother's Fernandes clan was known for their large stature; they were the *"Biggie Jew"* family.

The Robles family also had many branches that were differentiated by their nicknames: Our family was called *"Robles Gunst and Vlijt"* —the name of their two stores. The Robles de Medina family was *"Motjie Robles"* for some unknown reason. Henriques Robles was *"Bana Robles,"* (the Robleses who sold bananas). These names were sometimes endearing, sometimes descriptive, and sometimes insulting: One family was known as *"Brotsugru Jorka"* ("brown sugar demon") because of the father's ghoulish appearance. The family del Castilho was known as *"Broko foetoe Castilho"*—Castilho with the broken foot; the father limped. The de Bueno de Mesquita ladies were called *"Ban Ban Mesquita"* because they liked to party. The Levy ladies were called *"Popjie Levy"*—small like *popetjes* (dolls). Another Castilho family was called for the sugar goods they produced— *"Sucroe Samie Castilho." "Kopie Duym"* was short for Yaakob Duym.



Jewish Life

For my parents and for my immediate family, the Spanish Portuguese Synagogue—Zedek ve-Shalom—and all the organizations connected with Jewish life were central in our lives. Day and night our home was the center of caring for the poor, attending to the dead and dealing with affairs of the congregation. My mother was known for devotion to performing the *taharah*, the only *mitzvah* for which the recipient of the *hesed* cannot give thanks to the one who performed it.

I remember that once the whole family was dressed and ready to go to a celebration. The *shamash*, Mr. Abrahams, came by and informed my mother that a woman died in the community and a *taharah* had to be performed. My mother went to her bedroom, got out of her festive clothing, and quickly readied herself for this *mitzvah*. She was not tempted in the least to pass on this opportunity; she insisted we go to the party without her.

My mother also cared for many poor people in the community. Mrs. De Pina was an extremely poor Jewish woman who lived in a little house a few blocks away. My mother and Nina found out that she was dying. They came to the house to see what they could do to help. The house was filthy and the sick woman was uncared for. They bathed her, placed her outside in the sun, and proceeded to clean her house. They returned her to her own bed, now covered with fresh linen, and helped her spend her final days with dignity.

There were many opportunities for home celebrations. The night before a *brit milah*, we held a *vada*—a celebration which included the chanting of the *Shira (Shirat haYam*—the "Song of the Sea" the Children of Israel sang upon crossing the Red Sea) and many other sacred texts. An abundance of sweets was distributed to all the children. Early the next morning at the *brit* the baby was escorted in by two young boys with candles. I will never forget that at the *brit* of the child of my cousin, Betsy Azynmen-d'Fonseca, my brother Jules, who was holding one of the candles, fainted.



My father was president of the Sephardic synagogue, but in many ways was regarded as leader of the entire community. He had a heart of gold; if someone needed help, my father would not let him

down. One night we learned that a Jewish man who had escaped Devil's Island (French Guyana, our neighbor) was seeking the help of the Jewish community. Devil's Island was the notorious French penal colony known for its harsh conditions. (Alfred Dreyfus was sent there when accused of treason.) My father explained to us that no matter what, one does not betray another Jew, and this man was given food and shelter. It is from my parents that I learned the true meaning of one Jew caring for another.

Synagogue life for us was the central stage upon which many things played out. As children, we would often play *"snoga"* (short for *esnoga*) and imitate all the adults involved in our synagogue "Zedek Ve-Shalom." There was no shortage of colorful characters.

Every holiday provided another opportunity for an argument. Sometimes so many disagreements erupted in the synagogue that our holidays were ruined. At times, my father would get so aggravated that the doctor had to be called, and the beautiful day, for which my mother cooked and baked, could not be enjoyed to the fullest. The synagogue, the responsibilities for caring for some orphans (the Nassy children, whose parents had died during an influenza epidemic), and caring for the poor and the sick, pressed greatly on my father's shoulders. My brothers Ewald and Jules always helped with the services on the High Holidays. The women of the family went to synagogue faithfully and we knew many of the services and all the melodies by heart.



As a little girl, I was always happiest being amongst Jewish people and going to synagogue. I also went to Hebrew school, but what they taught us there on Sunday morning was nothing substantial.

The kids yelled and screamed and the *hazzan*/teacher could not keep order. It was a waste of time. My parents were upset and tried to introduce all kind of changes but nothing happened. They finally decided to hire Mr. Hartog Levy to come to the house to teach us. He was an Ashkenazi who preferred the Sephardic services to his own tradition. We learned a lot from him. My brother Ewald showed a great interest in Judaism and became very close to Oom Hartog.

Mr. Levy had sworn that he would never go back to the Ashkenazi synagogue again. But one day, they were in desperate need of a *hazzan* and begged him to come help out. Reluctantly he went back to do services on a Friday night. My brother Ewald walked him home that evening and all seemed to be well. The next morning when my brother went to fetch him, he learned that Mr. Levy had died during the night. We often wondered whether his broken oath might have cost him his life.



A historian could probably fill many books on the conflicts between Sephardim and Ashkenazim in countless communities around the world. Suriname was no different. The Sephardim had been the first Jews in Suriname and felt superior to the Ashkenazim, who came later. One could not be a full-fledged member of either synagogue unless born of that tradition.

After school, my brother Ewald and his friends were always fighting in the streets. In particular, Ewald and the son of the Ashkenazic Rabbi Agsteribbe were always fighting over who was superior, Ashkenazim or Sephardim. For example, Jacques Mesquita, who used to be the Sephardic *hazzan* for many years, fainted every Kippur

afternoon. He became a laughing stock of some Ashkenazim; this provided them with more evidence why they were superior to the Sephardim. Sometimes the situation became so bad that our Nina had to meet my brother and walk him home safely. Sometimes she also got into a fight with the boys.



In Suriname, as in so many other places in the world, Jewish organizational meetings rarely went smoothly. There were always disagreements, all-out fights and hard feelings. In the annals of our *esnoga* there was even a shooting! My Uncle Maurits Robles, father of Bep Samson, was very strong-willed, and he and my father were constantly at odds. My grandfather, Jacob Fernandes, and my father got along very well, but Opa Jacob couldn't tolerate all the fighting about synagogue matters. For the women in the family it was very unpleasant, because my grandfather eventually refused to go to our synagogue and went to the Ashkenazim instead. According to an old mutual agreement, Sephardim could not become members of the Ashkenazic Synagogue and vice versa.

Most Jews in Suriname welcomed the establishment of Zionist and JNF organizations. All of us worked very hard to try to get money together to help. Many evenings were organized, sometimes with a speaker. From early on I had a deep love for Israel, something that would find expression later in my life. (I was one of the thousands who danced in the streets in front of the United Nations when the State of Israel was declared.) The only person in the community who was violently against Zionism was Maurits Henriques Robles (married to my father's first cousin) and his family. He tried to boycott us when he could and made a lot of trouble. Chair throwing was not unheard of!

My parents were both very spiritual people. Before going to sleep at night, my father would tuck us in. After reciting the *"Shema"* ("Hear O Israel: The Lord is our G-d; the Lord is One"), he would say the following prayer with us for protection in the night and to bless us with health and happiness upon rising in the morning. I say it to this day.

Goede G-d in de Hemel
Barmachtige Vader
Wy danken U dat U ons in her leven hebt gehouden
Wy verzoeken U om kracht leven gezondheid voorspoed geluk en zegen
Ontferm en Bescherm ons op deze nacht
Waak over ones en zy on genadig; derbare G-d in de Hemel
Laten we rustig slapen en Weder ontwaken
Gezond en vrolyk zyn.
Amen.

Good G-d in Heaven/Merciful Father. We thank Thee for keeping us alive/Grant us strength, health, success, luck and blessing/Have mercy and protect us this night /Let us sleep peacefully and awaken refreshed/healthy and cheerful/Amen.

Bram Cardozo Arrives in Suriname

One year before the Second World War our congregation in Suriname began looking for a Rabbi/*Hazzan*. A letter and an advertisement were sent to Holland in search of a suitable candidate. After Kristallnacht, November 9, 1938, many rabbis left Germany and came to Holland. They were desperate for passports that would take them and their families out of Europe. Many highly qualified rabbis, Dutch and German, applied for the job, but the salary (paid for by the Dutch Government) and the living conditions were unsuitable for a married couple with children. Abraham Lopes

Cardozo, a single young man with the right credentials, was chosen. The house on the synagogue premises was perfect for one person; the second floor would be for the rabbi and the downstairs would be rented out. This appointment saved his life.

My father, Judah Robles, was *parnas* of the synagogue at this time. I remember clearly how all the letters and pictures of the candidates were laid out on my parents' bed. They decided to choose Bram Cardozo, a decision that would change the course of my life.

Bram arrived in Suriname by boat on a Shabbat, September 9, 1939. My father and a few others met him at the ship's docking place and took him home with them. In accordance with *halakhah,* Bram returned to the ship after Shabbat to make *habdalah.* He was installed as our *"Godsdienstleeraar"* (rabbi/religious teacher) on Monday night, September 11, 1939. The *esnoga* was brightly lit and filled to capacity. *Baruch Haba* was sung to welcome him, the Prayer for the Dutch Royal Family was recited and a prayer of thanksgiving (*Mizmor LeTodah*) was chanted. Bram addressed his new community. I remember how he humbly declared that he was *"maar en jongeling,"* merely a youngster, He also quoted Isaiah: *"Shomer ma mi-laila, shomer ma mil-leil."* I always remember the beautiful sound of those Hebrew words; I was twelve and didn't pay much attention to the translation. It means: "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" The prophet is asking: How long is the darkness to last? How near is the dawn of redemption? It's now clear to me that Bram was talking about the darkness that had descended upon the world with the rise of Nazi Germany. I can't remember whether he continued the quote with the response to the prophet's question, but I imagine he did because it very much expressed Bram's faith:" *"Ata boker v'gam laila"*—"The morning will come and also the night." In other words, both darkness and light are part of G-d's creation and in the face of darkness one must always anticipate the dawn. The service ended with a festive *Yigdal.*

This is a limerick written by Hans Samson for the occasion:

Met statig, groots majestuoso
Trad binnen Bram Lopes Cardozo
De Gemeente verheugd
Om zijn stralende jeugd,
Maar Abram, die vond het maar zo zo.

With great and stately majesty
walks in Bram Lopes Cardozo
the congregation is rejoicing
in his youth—but he doesn't make much of it.



The young people of our community formed a club named *Tikvat Yisrael.* We knew each other very well and some of us were related. There were many young men who had an eye on me, but I considered none of them seriously. During the Kippur services, the girls used to go to the house of the new young rabbi to use the bathroom. Tante Grace Mesquita, who lived downstairs in Bram Cardozo's house, used to run after the girls and yell "do not sit on the Rabbi's bed; you all are [ritually] unclean."



The community in my youth had deteriorated to the point that several poor Jewish girls became pregnant with their non-Jewish boyfriends' children. When the baby was a boy, there was the *halakhic*

obligation for a *brit milah* (Jewish circumcision ritual); according to *halakhah* the child of a Jewish mother is Jewish. The new *hazzan* Bram Cardozo was the *mohel* for the Sephardim and Mr. Agsterribe was the *mohel* for the Ashkenazim. Mr. Agsterribe often refused to perform circumcisions in these situations because the whole concept of these children coming out-of-wedlock, with non-Jewish fathers, was repugnant to him. My father took it upon himself time and time again, to go to Mr. Agsterribe's house and convince him to perform the *milah*.



Holidays in Suriname

Yom Kippur

Selihot were recited at 4 a.m. the morning before Kippur. My father and brothers would go to synagogue on their bicycles. People who never came to synagogue the entire year came to this early morning penitential prayer service, after which they walked to the Jewish cemetery (about an hour's walk away). There, *hashkabot* (memorial prayers) were said. You could hear the multitudes of people making their way back to their homes. Some people stopped in our house for breakfast, while at the same time my mother and Nina were cooking for the meal before the fast. Before that meal, my father would ride his bicycle to the synagogue to check if everything was ready—whether the copper chandeliers were shining, the benches were dusted, the Kippur books distributed. He prepared his copper box in which he stored his woolen *tallit* and soft, non-leather shoes.

The synagogue had an especially holy atmosphere on Kippur. The *tebah* (Reader's desk) and the *heikhal* (Torah ark) were clothed in white. Most of the women also dressed in white. Men wore black suits and top hats. In addition to the core group of people who came to the synagogue regularly, on Kippur the synagogue was filled to the brim with people who only came once a year. Almost everybody participated enthusiastically and vocally in the service. There were those, like Phili Fernandes, who had no interest whatsoever in what was going on. Such people were part and parcel of the community and were well tolerated. With his characteristic humor, Phili told us that he passed the time in the synagogue counting the candles in the chandeliers!

Succot

On Succot, a big *"cabana"* was built in the garden of the synagogue. We called it a *"loofhut."* It was beautifully decorated and covered with *"trulee"* (hut-covering material). A long table covered with a white tablecloth was placed in the center and benches lined the sides. When the holiday arrived, the Trustees of the synagogue sat around the long table and children were forbidden from approaching. Occasionally, a child would go to the table where his father was sitting and a big argument erupted. Rather than being a *"Succat Shalom,"* in congregation Zedek ve-Shalom, the cabana was always a place where arguments broke out.

One Succot, the new *hazzan* Bram Cardozo was called to perform a *brit milah* in Moengo, a town many miles into the rainforest. A boy was born to the family of the diamond dealer Bernard Schipper. They had come to Suriname as refugees from Holland and worked for the Kersten, a company headquartered there. His brother Hermann had gone to school with Bram in Amsterdam. I vividly remember watching as he boarded the boat, truly a sight to

be seen, equipped with his *lulab* and *etrog* and wearing his white tropical clothing.

Simhat Torah

The Simhat Torah holiday was celebrated with dignity and restraint in the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue. Sometimes, new brides actually came to synagogue in their bridal gowns in keeping with the image of the people of Israel as brides receiving their beloved Torah. The Ashkenazim had a more lively celebration and we often went there after our service.

Pesach

The Pesach season started weeks in advance of the holiday itself. My mother would bake Pesach goodies (cookies etc.) so that we would have plenty to eat the whole week. Wine and cheese came from Holland and during the war, from America. My mother was also known to make her own wine on occasion. The *matzot* were also imported. These purchases were very expensive and we had to supplement with cassava-bread, potatoes and other foodstuffs that were not *hametz* (leavened). All the preparations were made downstairs, and my mother, Malina (my grandfather's sister, whose real name was Selina) and of course our Nina, were busy for days. The *haroset* was made of coconut, and cooked in a very big pot for hours (see recipe on page 32).

Every observant household was busy with the same preparations, otherwise there would not be enough food to eat for the entire week. To supplement the *matzot*, my mother made cassava-bread, a kind of flat cracker made from cassava flour. The cassava was first washed and grated, then dried in the sun for weeks. Once dried,

it was ready to be mixed with other ingredients—the Suriname version of potato starch.

Because of all the hard work that had to be done before the holiday, my mother hired a lady by the name of Gelina de Pina; she was very common and screamed when she talked. My brother Ewald would stand on the stairs and yell *"Gelina de Pina, e wakka ping matsot!"* ("Gelina de Pina is going around piercing *matzot!*") This taunt made Gelina very angry and it would take two people to calm her down and beg her not to leave.

Pesach week we would eat a lot of potatoes, eggs, and fish. My brother Ewald would bring his friends and they would eat all the goodies by the handful. If a pot of soup was on the stove, he would take out soup plates and serve the soup around. The seventh evening of Pesach my mother's whole family came for dinner, and I remember that my mother made cabbage soup with *matzah* balls. Two boxes of *matzot* were always put away, because it was our custom to make *matzah-shalet*—a sweet *matzah* pudding—from them on Shabuot.



One Pesach my brother Jules and I came down with typhus and a very high fever. My parents did not want us to go to the unsanitary local hospital, so a special room was prepared for us in the house where we were quarantined from everybody. During the day my mother wore a white apron and took care of us. In the room was a basin with Lysol; she had to wash her hands each time she came in and out. We were not allowed to eat *matzot*—or any solid food—and everything had to be strained. The door of the dining room was opened on the two *seder* evenings, so that

we could hear the reading of the *hagaddah*. Nina refused to have a nurse in the house to take care of us at night. She would put a mat on the floor by our bed and would sleep on it.

And on the topic of health, if one of us complained about a pain in our bodies, out came the Vicks Vapo-Rub. My father believed strongly in the healing powers of this ointment. Before we could say a word, it was being smeared all over our bodies. The Vicks people had a very good customer in our family! Until this day, I always have a little jar of Vicks in my medicine cabinet.

Seven-Fruit Haroset

Passover was a particularly busy time in the cooking and eating department. Known for its abundance of food and sweets all year round, our household was a gathering place for the young and the hungry on Pesach.

I maintained this tradition in our own home in New York. On Erev Pesach, the house would be filled with the sweet fragrance of the slow-cooked Surinamese *haroset*. Many eager customers would line up at my door for a sampling to take home or use at their own *seder*. Joan Nathan first published this recipe in the New York Times and included it in many of her cookbooks.

8 ounces unsweetened coconut
8 ounces chopped walnuts or 8 ounces grated almonds
1/4 cup sugar
1 tablespoon cinnamon
8 ounces raisins
8 ounces dried apples
8 ounces dried prunes
8 ounces dried apricots
8 ounces dried pears

4 ounces cherry jam
Sweet red wine

Combine everything except the jam and wine in a pot. Cover with water and simmer over low heat. Periodically, add small amounts of water to prevent sticking. Use a wooden spoon to mix. Cook at least 90 minutes. When it is cohesive, stir in the jam and let stand until cool. Add enough sweet wine to be absorbed by the haroset and chill. Makes 5 cups.

A Working Life

When I was 16, I had to go to work; it was wartime and there was no contact with Holland. I took a job for very little pay; after two weeks working in that office, I enlisted in the Dutch army. I was immediately placed in the office of the Territorial Commander with two of my very close friends, Yvonne Fernandes and Janneke Van Ravenswaay. We worked very well together. I could not stand the training exercises and shooting lessons. Many times I tried to get out of these exercises, which made my commander very angry. We called her Driba, an unflattering nickname used in Suriname for an annoying person. For some reason she had a German accent and I couldn't stand listening to her.

One night there was a party in the Club near the river. Our boss the Territorial Commander was a nice person, full of life, very kind. At this party he got very drunk; this was reported to Headquarters in London. The next morning he was transferred and had to leave immediately. The man who reported him was promoted to his position and all of us in the office were upset. The new commander was a first-class anti-Semite; he brought in another of his kind. My friend Yvonne and I felt very uncomfortable and out of place. We asked to be transferred to another office. To my luck Hugo Pos, a friend of the family, became the head of the Dutch U.S.O.; I

went to work for him and had a very good time. I stayed on with a schoolmate of mine and I had full charge of the office.

Although we were far away from the actual fighting, Suriname too was on high alert. One night, we detected a German submarine trying to infiltrate waters near Suriname. We in the office were asked to stay in order to process messages being exchanged with other Allied forces. I sent word to my parents that I needed to stay at work. I did not return home until the early morning hours. My father was very upset and wanted to know what the emergency was. I was sworn to secrecy and could not tell him. I know he trusted me but nonetheless could not understand why I could not reveal more. I felt frustrated because I loved my father so much and needed his understanding.



After a little while I had enough of the army; I was asked by the Commissioner of Waterways to come work for him. When I came to that office, I had to clean up work that the person before me had neglected for a very long time. It was a gigantic job, but I did it in a short time. I soon began noticing a few things that were not so pleasant. People in the office were very jealous and they thought I got special treatment from the boss. The boss was known as a Nazi-lover. One morning I came to the office to find a swastika drawn on a piece of paper on my desk. I called my father and he told me to leave the job immediately. I went to the boss, and told him about my decision. He profusely apologized and asked me to reconsider.



On the home front, my sister Dorine married Harry Emanuels. He was a teacher and later went to Holland to study law. When they were still in Suriname, she gave birth to an adorable little boy named Henry. He was my parents' first grandchild and my first nephew. We were all overjoyed and all had a special love for this child. The two of us were very close and he used to call me "maima" and come to ride the "horsie" on my stomach. When I left Suriname, it was especially hard to leave Henry behind.

The week before his bar mitzvah he got very ill; the doctors had many different opinions and did not act quickly enough. Three days after his bar mitzvah he died from peritonitis. When the news reached me in New York where I was living, it was as if lightning had struck me. I never overcame this loss. Whenever I think of him my eyes fill up with tears. He was such a special, loving and bright child. Thank G-d, my sister and her husband had two lovely girls, Yvonne and Dorothy, who brought them much joy after their tragic loss.

2

New Horizons

To the U.S.A.

Three of my girlfriends had already left for America to work for the Dutch Marines in Washington. They informed me that their office was hiring more young people who could speak and write Dutch. I was interested in this opportunity. Very soon my friends wrote me to join them; a job had become available. My parents were very unhappy about my decision to take the job abroad. I wanted out. Things at home were not so pleasant anymore; my brother Ewald had a girlfriend who was my mother's age. My parents did not accept her, and there were constant disagreements in the house. Whether I wanted to or not, I became deeply involved in these matters. I knew that I had to leave and seek a better future. My father was not well and that made the decision much more difficult.

In May 1945 I left Suriname on a "water plane" to Miami. It was a very hard day for all concerned, and it was not an easy farewell.

Tante Elly came by in her car, cheered my parents' spirits and drove me to the plane. I cried all the way to Miami.

Washington, D.C.

On the day I arrived, President Roosevelt died. I was worried that this would affect my job; thankfully, it did not. I had never seen a city like Washington, D.C. before. The big buildings, the streets filled with people were all new to me. I acclimated very quickly to the new environment; the day after I arrived, I was already at work in the very heart of America's capital. Our office in Washington was in the Pentagon building. Before we received our badges to enter the building, we were questioned at length by the FBI and the security services. Many important people from all over the world had their offices in this building and we became part of a whirlwind of activity. We were invited to many parties at embassies and had a great deal of fun meeting many important and interesting people.

Post-war Washington was an extremely exciting place to be, but to my dismay, one filled with racial tension. I had a friend from Suriname—a highly intelligent fair-skinned mulatto girl— who was also working for the Dutch Armed forces. The movie theatres were segregated; when we went to see a film, she wore a hat to cover her face, lest they not admit her. The Suriname that we grew up in was made up of a collection of ethnic groups. She never experienced this type of racism until she came to America, "land of the free."



I joined my friends who lived in a boarding house with other girls who were also working for the Dutch Marines in the Pentagon.

Some of the girls who lived in our boarding house went to church on Sunday, and had the habit of borrowing clothes from us. We went to synagogue on Friday nights; many times my roommates did not feel like going and I went on my own. One day we were asked by one of the non-Jewish girls to which religion we belonged. Without hesitation I told them that we were Jewish. This news circulated throughout the house. The landlady wasted no time in making all kinds of excuses to get us to move out. She informed us that our rooms were needed and we had to find new lodgings. My roommates were very angry with me, but as a proud Jew I had no choice but to tell the truth. Our landlady needed to be taught a lesson. Before we left we saw to it that all the toilets in the rooming house were clogged.

We looked around and at last found a boarding house with a Jewish landlady, Mrs. Dissin. She made us feel very welcome and fed us well. In fact, I remember having my first taste of lamb chops at her table. After we were there for a few months, I came home from work one afternoon with a very bad pain in my stomach. I was rolling around in agony. A doctor, Dr. Resta, who lived in the same building, came up and rushed me to the hospital. I had a cyst on one of my ovaries and needed an operation immediately. Thank G-d they caught it in time. It took three weeks before I could go back to work. For me this episode was a great trauma: here I was, in a strange country, with little money, far away from my family. It was not easy to be sick without the loving care of my parents and Nina. My faith kept me going, and soon I was well again.



When the war ended, there was great confusion in the Jewish community about the whereabouts of European family members.

Knowing of my relocation to Washington, the Samson family from Suriname asked if I could find out anything about Els Samuels, their relative who was living in Holland before the war. I called the Dutch embassy and inquired not only about this person, but also about Bram Cardozo's family. He knew that they probably had perished, but knew no specifics. It took a little while, but I found out that a deal was made regarding Els Samuels and that she was alive in Switzerland. About the Lopes Cardozo family there was nothing more specific than the report that all the Sephardim were deported to Bergen-Belsen and that a transport took them to Sobibor. Fifty years later we went to Yad Vashem, against Bram's will, and received the Red Cross lists with the exact dates of their murder by the Nazis.

Bram had been keeping Tisha B'Ab, the universal day of Jewish mourning, as the *nahalah* for all his relatives. To know the date and circumstances under which each perished was discomfiting. From that time on, he marked their *nahalah* both on Tisha B'Ab and the date they were murdered.

My own family suffered losses during the war. Although Suriname was far from the battlefields of WWII, there was a very close connection with the motherland, Holland. People went there to study and to live. Elena da Costa, my first cousin, daughter of my aunt Josephine, had married Jacques Bueno de Mesquita. They lived in Amsterdam and had two lovely children. All of them were deported, never to return. Her brother Ivan worked with the Dutch resistance, and through that he saved his own life. Her brother Eric also survived.

New York City

After Roosevelt's death, the situation in the Far East and Europe was easing up; the Marines for whom we were working were planning

to leave. My friends and I were asked to join them in their move to Holland, but we refused. We decided to move to New York and look for jobs. We visited NYC for a weekend and I was overwhelmed; how could I possibly live in a city with so much hustle-bustle? Nonetheless we decided to give it a try.

We took the train from Washington to New York and found lodging in a rooming house on West 22nd Street. I found a job within two days with the Dutch Shipping Company. My boss was Mr. Moscow. After a few months, this company also moved back to Holland.

During World War II, all of us who came to work in the Pentagon were in the U.S.A. on a government visa. That meant that we were free from taxes and under the control of the U.S. authorities. Sometime after the war was over we could not enjoy these privileges any longer and had to acquire an immigration visa, which was not so easy to get. When we came to this country, we were Dutch citizens. The Dutch quota had been filled and we had to travel to Canada to find a way to come back to the U.S. as immigrants. I hired a lawyer and learned that I had to find a new job immediately. Through a friend, I heard that there was a job opening in New York at the *"Nederlandse Handel Maatschappy,"* a Dutch trading bank with headquarters in Amsterdam. My future boss promised to employ me immediately. I was very lucky. In twenty-four hours, all was arranged and I could come back as an immigrant to the United States. Of course, all these comings and goings cost me a lot of money. The lawyer, who was Dutch, had helped many other Dutch people. He made an agreement with me that I could pay his fee in monthly installments. I paid him every penny. How I fulfilled all my obligations is still a mystery to me.

The job at the Dutch trading bank started on January 1, 1946. The first morning after the New Year, I got up for my first day of work

and discovered that I had a very high fever and the flu. Luckily, I recovered quickly. This was a very good position and I wanted to do everything to keep it. Very soon they discovered that I was reliable and trustworthy and they gave me the secret combination to the safe, and the key to the closet with the secret correspondence. It was a very pleasant workplace. We all got along very well, and with my friend Hilda Frerker, I was assigned many projects. Much of our work involved insurance claims of ships impounded, torpedoed or sunk during the war. It was a very busy time. Everybody who came from Holland was shopping for goods here to send to their families, even the boss and his family. Hilda and I had the job of making the packages and shipping them immediately.

One morning I got up with a very bad case of the measles with a high fever. I had no one to care for me at home and I was forced to go to the public hospital in the middle of the East River. It was a horrible place. Annie and Julie Fernandes, two Surinamese friends of my family who had moved to New York several years before me, were very helpful and kind, but limited their visits because they were afraid of catching the measles. Three weeks after recovering from the measles I came down with smallpox. I was devastated but I had no choice but to go back to that unhygienic hospital—where I had probably contracted smallpox in the first place! It took a long time before I became strong enough to go back to work. I was very well-liked and respected at my job, and they were very kind to wait for me each time to return.

Social Life

Other than work and synagogue, my social life was limited. My girlfriends and I joined a Zionist group where many European refugees gathered. Many marriages resulted from these group meetings: my friend and roommate Thelma met Eric Weissberger there;

he was saved on a *Kindertransport.* Micheline Padawer met Marc Ratzersdorfer and they married. Jules Sacks, who was also from Holland, attended meetings.

I tried hard to maintain contact with people who I knew from back home: Willy Emanuels and I sometimes went for dinner together. My good friend Lottie Firth and I were very close. We shared many good and bad times. We both had to work for our existence. When my money was gone at the end of the month, Lottie took me for dinner; when her money ran out, I took her for dinner. She was a short, sweet, fun girl. She met a young man named Haim; he was twice her size, so I named them Haim *Va-heitzie* (Haim and a Half). They decided to move to a kibbutz in Israel. After they left, I felt sad and very lonely, but continued on.



My friends and I first lived in an apartment on 22nd Street and then in one on West 69th Street. After a year or two all my roommates got married. Hilda Gomperts went to Holland to get married to Jules Samson; Elaine Emanuels had met a soldier on the train on her way to Canada for her immigration papers; she decided to marry him. At a Zionist meeting, Thelma Gomperts met Eric Weissberger and soon got married.

With my roommates all married, I moved to the Sussex Hotel on West 72nd Street near Columbus Avenue with Marielle Cazes (aunt of Sylvia Bengualid). She was a beautiful girl; after a while she decided to return to her family in Casablanca. The rent was too high for me to pay alone so I took in a girl named Nora Epstein. Later, I had a German-Jewish roommate whose parents had fled to

Argentina. Ultimately, it was too small an apartment for two and I decided to stay alone despite the monetary strain.

From month to month, not a penny was left in my bank account and I had to live from hand to mouth. I sent home as much money as I could to help my parents. I worked many overtime hours; I used to leave the house at 7:30 in the morning and come home from Wall Street after 9 in the evening, without food in my stomach. I had to work the extra hours to meet my expenses. One of my after work jobs was with Mr. Van Saher, who I later on found out was an important collector of Dutch art. His family's art collection –he was from the Goudstikker family—was taken by Goering from Holland and sent to Germany. (Only after 60 years was the collection recovered. Some is still in private hands.) Sometimes I was so tired that all I ate for dinner was a cheese sandwich and an apple.

My Synagogue

Whenever I did not oversleep on Saturday morning I went to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue on 70th Street and Central Park West. It was an awesome place, but one in which I felt completely at home. The *nusah* was virtually the same as in Suriname. I quickly became a part of synagogue life. The ladies of the Sisterhood of the Synagogue organized a big bazaar; I assisted them in organizing things and selling merchandise. The bazaar was a great success, and the best part was that many of the people with whom I worked became very good friends.

On the very first Shabbat at the synagogue I met Herman Salomon. He invited me to lunch at his parents' home at 101 Central Park West, directly across the street from the synagogue. I met his father Ivan Salomon and his mother Sophie. They were an impressive older couple who had become enamored of the Spanish and Portuguese

tradition during their sojourn in Amsterdam after leaving Germany. Ivan helped many people leave Europe and he managed to leave Amsterdam for Montreal before the war started. In Montreal, he once again affiliated himself with a Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue. After the war, Ivan had the foresight to create an organization of European Orthodox rabbis who survived the war. Their first meeting took place in Amsterdam and Queen Juliana invited them to meet with her. She asked that Leo Palache (more about him later) *kasher* one of the palace kitchens so that they would be able to dine with her. Ivan Salomon earned the respected European title *"Haver"* (important friend/fellow) for spearheading and supporting the rebuilding of European Jewry after the war.

After two years in Montreal, the Salomons moved to N.Y., where they lived opposite the *esnoga* (synagogue). They immediately joined the congregation and Ivan became a respected member who dispensed sage advice and counsel. His many donations to the synagogue showed a generosity that equaled his vision. He was an imposing yet welcoming person who loved hosting people in his home. His wife Sophie was a colorful partner who made these gatherings possible. She oftentimes had her own agenda and was known to call the doctor to make a home visit so that Ivan would be forcibly separated from guests who had overstayed their welcome. At the Salomons' I met many people from the Congregation who were also invited for lunch, dinner and festivities. My future husband—the *hazzan* Bram Cardozo—was a regular guest.

In his later years, Ivan Salomon invited many people whom Bram knew from before the war in Holland to visit New York: Leo and Avraham Palache, Rabbi Schuster, Rev. Nabarro and his son David, as well as countless others. He wanted to inspire them by exposing them to the rich community life in New York.

When I think about it, most of the good things that happened in my life (and in my future husband Bram's as well) originated with the Salomon family. Ivan Salomon was the one who seized the initiative and convinced the trustees to hire Bram, who had come to New York on a visit from Suriname right after the war. Ivan and Sophie provided a welcoming home for each of us, two people alone in this country and much in need of the warm embrace of family. Their children Herman, Robert and Els Salomon and Charlie (*Haim Meshulam*) and Els Bendheim expanded on this largesse of friendship; they and their children continue to grace my life to this day. This family was truly an *Ets Haim*, a Tree of Life, for me as well as for my future family.

Longing for Home

Despite my developing life in New York, many times I contemplated going back to Suriname in order to see my ailing father. Financial commitments stopped me. Right after the war, my brother Jules went to Holland to study engineering. Together with my brother Ewald and my parents, I helped pay for his studies. Jules also borrowed money from Phili Fernandes, a Suriname friend living in New York. To protect this money he had to take out insurance, the premium of which we also paid. I remember going to Sears Roebuck to purchase items that he needed for his studies. In what were to be the last two weeks of my father's life, we insisted that my mother take a nurse to help out; for her and for Nina alone it had become impossible to care for my father. It was Christmastime and I worked day and night in a small local store to make extra money.

My father loved me very much and always said I reminded him of his mother. I knew his health was failing. He had what they then called "rich blood," which in today's terms might be high blood pressure and high cholesterol. The only treatment they had was

using leeches. I desperately wanted to see him again but would have had to borrow money to make the trip. I had a very good job and I did not want to lose it. I already had many obligations to fulfill, and I did not want another debt that I could not pay back. I did not know what to do. Dr. Leo Figur was my doctor at that time. One Sunday afternoon I went to him to discuss the matter. He looked straight into my eyes and said: "My dear girl, if you go back to Suriname you will never return to the U.S.A.; all you have built up in a short time will be destroyed. I know it is a hard decision to make, but this is honest and good advice I am giving you." I am happy that I listened to him, because he was so right.



My worst fears came to pass: On a Monday morning in December, Phili Fernandes came to my office to tell me that my father had died. I was devastated. My brother Ewald and his girlfriend were in the U.S.A. at that time. His girlfriend wasn't Jewish and I knew that my parents were virulently against this match. My late father had said that if Ewald went through with this relationship he would never be allowed to recite services from the *tebah* again. How could I accept her at my father's *shivah*? It caused a lot of tension. Nonetheless, both of us sat *shivah* side-by-side in my little apartment on West 72nd Street. Many people came to see us, and every night people spilled out into the hall during *minyan*.

After we got up from the *shivah* my brother came down with a very bad case of bronchitis and was bedridden. Between going to work and visiting him, I was exhausted. While I was sitting *shivah* my office called me ten times a day with questions; after eight days they

were very happy to see me back. I plunged right back into my work, and stayed late hours to catch up on what I had missed.

With G-d's help I managed to get through this difficult time. It was hard to imagine that good things were awaiting me.

3

Building a Bayit Ne'eman B'Yisrael

Love & Marriage

Bram Cardozo was the young Amsterdam-born hazzan in Suriname when I was a teenager. In 1945, he took a six-month leave and came to New York. While in New York he was asked to do services. This led to an invitation to join the congregational staff. Bram returned to Suriname and gave notice. My late father, president of the community, was very upset. "A captain does not leave a sinking ship," he said. But Bram, as the sole survivor of his family, knew that there was no future in Suriname for him, whereas New York was bustling with Jewish life. On January 1, 1946, he officially began his job at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue.



Bram and I often met at the Salomon home and at the home of Annie and Julie Fernandes in the Hargrave Hotel on 72nd Street. The

Fernandes family had always been a fun-loving family in Suriname, and now, transplanted to New York, they continued making parties and celebrations to which we were both invited. I knew Bram from Suriname, but being ten years my senior, he had been adult at that time and I a teenager. Now the age difference didn't matter; I was 26 and he was 36. Bram was always friendly and often expressed his dismay that I had to work so hard and so very late.

On December 9, 1950, Bram called me and invited me to be his guest at the annual Sisterhood-theatre-party; after that we saw each other practically every day. December 24 was a Shabbat; I had gone to Synagogue that day and was invited to the home of the Salomon family for lunch. Later Bram asked me to come to *minhah* services and to go home with him after evening services. That evening, to my great surprise, he asked me to marry him. I was very much taken aback, but accepted with great happiness. We immediately called our friends, and sent a telegram to my mother in Suriname. The Salomon family wanted us to come over for a *l'haim* after our engagement (it was Christmas Day, December 25, 1950). Herman Salomon organized a big party in his home to celebrate the occasion. Els and Robert Salomon also made an engagement reception for us in their home. Many of our friends were invited to attend and meet us as an officially betrothed couple. They also held a tea for the Trustees to formally welcome me. We were invited to the home of the Hendricks' and the Nathans' to get acquainted. It was a great and busy time.



When Bram and I were engaged, the executive director of the synagogue, Victor Tarry, and his wife Hanna were extremely nice to us; we were invited often to their home for Shabbat lunch, and also to

the home of Hanna's parents, the Goldfarbs. Hanna's sister, Gertrude Welkes, was very kind and hospitable. It was always a pleasure to be with this family. They were known for their musicality; there was always lively singing at their table. A year later, when our daughter Debbie was born, Gertrude Welkes gave us baby clothing, a carriage, and all the necessary equipment needed for a newborn. It was a great help to us, because we could not afford too much.

After our engagement, Bram wanted me to meet some cousins living in Brooklyn. They were a branch of his family who had moved from Amsterdam to Charlston, North Carolina in the mid-nineteenth century. They were lovely, fine, aristocratic people advanced in age. One Sunday we went to meet them; I was so happy to meet another Abraham Lopes Cardozo! (In the Cardozo family—the firstborn males were all called Avraham.) Aunt Clara Lopes Cardozo, Aunt 'Lis Ottolenghi and Aunt Bea Lopes Cardozo were three darling and adorable sisters. Their physician brother Abraham had lost a son during the war. They received us with love, charm and happiness, by which Bram and I were very moved. Even though they were not strictly kosher, they prepared a light lunch for us and the table was filled with lovely foods that we could eat. Their home was spotless, and everything was served as if we were in a palace. The silver and glasses were shining; fine linen covered the table. This family lived very long lives and I think I know why. They took a lot of time to sit at their table and enjoy their meal. Nobody rushed or got up to answer the telephone. Their dignity and nobility was felt in their every move. They told us some lovely anecdotes about the family and their Sephardic upbringing. One story we heard that day told of how their grandfather, the ancestor they shared with Bram, was a special tutor to the orphaned daughter of a Jewish member of the cavalry corps protecting the King of Holland. The child's father had been killed in the line of duty and the King insisted that the daughter, whose mother had died in childbirth, be raised in the palace and

receive a Jewish education. She went on to marry him and establish a beautiful Jewish home.

It was a very pleasant unforgettable afternoon. We sang some old Sephardic melodies that delighted all of us. It was uncanny how they looked so very much like Bram. I never had the privilege to know any of his immediate family. Shortly after this visit we began making plans for our wedding and decided to ask them to act as stand-ins for Bram's parents at our wedding. They lovingly agreed.



Bram and I were both living alone. Dr. de Sola Pool, the rabbi at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, thought it wise we get married immediately. I was working long hours and could not arrange everything by myself. I was also limited financially. Help came in the form of the wonderful Schneirson family and the ladies of the Sisterhood who arranged the wedding reception; it was paid for by the Synagogue societies. The caterer, Mr. Wechsler, donated the food and tons of chopped liver found its way into the stomachs of the hundreds of hungry people who honored us with their presence at our wedding.

We picked Sunday, March 11 as our wedding day, one week before Purim. I had practically nothing in the bank and I did everything in my power to earn a few extra dollars: overtime at the office, as a secretary to a lawyer and his wife, and babysitting on weekends. Some of my friends offered to lend me money, but I couldn't accept their generosity. Bram, who didn't have much himself, did what he could to help. My brother Ewald sent me a hundred dollars to buy my wedding dress and my mother, may she rest in peace, sent me money to defray the cost of my wardrobe. I went to 14th Street and found a beautiful wedding dress. My bridesmaids' dresses cost three

to four dollars more than my wedding dress. At that time, a few dollars was a substantial sum of money. Everybody was extremely nice and helpful and the day passed in happiness and contentment. The only people missing were my mother and my family. I would like to think that my late father had some kind of premonition that I would marry Bram: we went out on our first official "date" almost exactly a year to the day after my father died.

The choirmaster at the time of our wedding was Mr. Bress. His wife was very fond of Bram and knowing Bram had no parents, she presented him with a beautiful new *tallit* before the wedding. Together with the Sisterhood ladies, she also made a new *huppah* in honor of our wedding. When we got married, the Sisterhood's sewing circle embroidered my initials on all our towels.



Shortly before our wedding, an American couple met my brother while visiting the synagogue in Suriname. He took them to our family home where my mother served them a delicious lunch. They were very appreciative and promised my mother to help me set up house. The wife was in the wholesale furniture business. When they returned to the U.S., the woman took me to showrooms and pressured me to buy furniture that I could not afford. The salesman couldn't stand her and gave me warning looks. I spent more money than planned, but we ended up having some good pieces that have lasted all these years.



With all this happiness and joy, there were still people who voiced the opinion that Bram could have married a rich and beautiful girl. One said this right to my face. Others had Bram in mind for their own single friends and family. It was hard to ignore these murmurings, but I put my best foot forward and knew that the Almighty had brought the two of us together after so many years for a good reason. Who else could I have married who would have experienced life in Suriname, who would have known my parents—especially my late father? With whom could I have lived a good Spanish and Portuguese Jewish life? And from Bram's perspective, it was my family's community who had stood by his side when the news reached him that his entire family had perished in the concentration camps. They supported and embraced him.

It is said that G-d spends his "spare time" making matches; this match was definitely crafted in heaven. And for that gift, I am eternally grateful.

March 11, 1951

On my wedding day, I got dressed in the home of Julie and Annie Fernandes. They were like family to me before my marriage and after. Along with Phili and Be, Lin and Coen, they always provided me with a special Surinamese warmth. Ruth Fidanque, a member of the synagogue from one of the synagogue's founding early families, picked me up in her car and drove me to the synagogue. Mrs. Schneirson noticed that my wedding dress did not have a proper lining; she ran home and got a slip for me.

When we arrived, the radiant Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue was filled to capacity. The choir participated in the service that was led by Rabbis de Sola Pool, Gerstein, and David Jessurun Cardozo. My bridesmaids were Lillian Steindecker (a granddaughter of the

Salomons) and Judy Schneirson; flowergirls were Alette Montezinos, two Stambler girls, Mikki Farro and Carla Salomon who is still near and dear to me. Phili Fernandes and his wife Be stood as my parents, Dr. Abraham Lopes Cardozo and Aunt Lis Lopes Cardozo-Ottolenghi stood as Bram's parents. The New York Times sent a photographer for the wedding picture that accompanied a one-column article. It was a beautiful community affair with many ladies from the Synagogue acting as hostesses.

After the wedding some friends got together and took us to Schreiber's Restaurant (at the Millburn Hotel on 76th Street near Broadway) for a wedding dinner party with *shebah berakhot.* The cost of this party was paid for by the people present because we could not afford to host everyone. Schreiber's was a place where we often ate on Shabbat when we were engaged and later as newlyweds. They served prepaid Shabbat meals and so it was a popular spot for other young couples such as Hugo and Margie Kahn, Mina and Willy Schultz and the Levmores.



The day after our wedding we went to Atlantic City for a few days of rest and relaxation. When we walked onto the bus, we were delighted to see Shlomo Carlebach with his guitar, on his way to Lakewood Yeshiva where he was studying. He was present at our wedding along with his parents, Rabbi and Mrs. Naftali Carlebach, who had often invited me Friday nights after dinner. A whole group of young people would gather every week at the Carlebachs to hear about the *Parshat Hashabua* (weekly Torah portion). Rabbi Carlebach always insisted I sit next to him. I remember a *shiur* that he gave about Purim. His teaching was so vivid that I could imagine Queen Esther herself sitting with us around the table. Bram would

also occasionally attend these Carlebach classes. I remember Dr. Reiss and Mina Schultz from those Friday nights. Years later, when we had a young family, we had the pleasure of hearing Shlomo perform at the Village Gate, which marked the beginning of a whole new era in Jewish life and Jewish music. He and his twin brother Eli Chaim provided the Jewish world with a new energy. Having been privileged to know his pious parents with their table full of young guests, I knew that the apples had not fallen very far from the Carlebach family tree.

In Atlantic City we stayed at the Breakers Hotel, and to our surprise Joel Schneirson came to visit us and had dinner with us. He was from a very philanthropic family that made large donations to the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue. Before we married, Bram accompanied Joel and Herman Salomon to Israel the year the State was declared. This adventurous trip was paid for by the Schneirsons and the Salomons. Bram was the chaperone. Mrs. Pool was there at the time and showed them around. They made a stop in Switzerland where Bram met the Herlands family, Geichen (nee Bendheim) and her husband William (who later became a Federal court judge and president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations).

The widow of the late Dr. Rabbi Henri Pereira Mendes lived in Atlantic City at that time; the family called her "mamsi." She insisted that we come for a blessing, so we went for afternoon tea. She told us that she was related to the Robles family. It is unbelievable how many people took an interest in our wedding. We had to rush back within a few days because Bram had to read the *megillah* on Purim. Our life together had begun.



The Piano

After we married, we acquired our very first piece of furniture: a piano, a Baldwin Acrosonic upright that was hauled into our tiny apartment through the window in the middle of a snowstorm. For Bram, a house was not a home without a piano. Bram's father was a violinist; together with his two brothers, they had a band and entertained at many gatherings. All of them could play many instruments—keyboards, string, reed and brass. The late Mrs. Zus Schlachter remembered Bram's father playing at her wedding to Dr. Leon Figur (her first husband and the doctor who advised me not to return to Suriname) in Amsterdam before the war. Mrs. Bella Montezinos, another Dutch Portuguese Jew transplanted to New York, often reminisced about how beautifully Bram's family band played at many communal holiday celebrations.

For Bram, music was life. The story is told that when Bram was a toddler, he would only eat while sitting at the piano. He grew up immersed in music—Jewish, popular and classical, and had an amazing "ear." Whatever he heard, he could play. He loved transposing the key of a piece on demand while playing.

The piano was truly the center of our house. Bram played all the time, and would until the end of his life. He used it often to help teach unmusical bar-mitzvah boys. After Kippur, once we had broken fast and put up the frame of our *succah* (in the years that we had one in the courtyard), we would all gather around the piano singing tunes from the *esnoga*. When a special guest would come into the apartment, Bram would run to the piano to play *"Baruch Habah"* (Blessed be you who come in the name of Hashem). Every year we had a Gilbert and Sullivan evening at our home. And on the birthday of all family members, even little infants, Bram would go to the piano immediately after morning services to regale the birthday girl or boy with an over-the-phone rendition of "Happy Birthday."

The Cardozo Family Grows

Ten months after we were married, I expected little Debby, our first child. During my pregnancy, I had to be hospitalized for a few days; I could not keep down any food and needed intravenous feeding. It was funny because during my pregnancy, I craved mushrooms. Bram would take me to "Famous" Dairy Restaurant on 72nd Street between Broadway and West End Avenue where I would eat mushrooms, get sick and then eat them again.

With my difficult pregnancy, it was impossible for me to continue working. We lived at 18 West 69th Street in a studio apartment with a tiny elevator. We were looking for a bigger place, but with a limited fixed small salary we could not find anything in the neighborhood. Debby was born on January 27, 1952 at Jewish Memorial Hospital in Washington Heights. Bram and I were overjoyed with our baby; she was so pretty. Bram would go to the nursery all the time to see her. She was named after Bram's mother Deborah. This was an emotional time for him.

In those days, a woman was hospitalized for eight days after giving birth. Bram came to the hospital every day to see us. It was January and there was a big snowstorm. The ground was covered in snow and ice. Bram didn't let the weather discourage him from visiting. While waiting for the local train on the subway platform on 125th Street and 8th Avenue, he was attacked by a man who hit him in the face. He yelled out for help and people responded. Bram's attacker fled and thank G-d Bram was not harmed, but he was badly bruised and all shaken up. The next morning Dr. Jacobson, a friend of ours, told me that Bram had fallen in the snow. When I saw Bram, I immediately knew he had been attacked.

When we were told that I could go home, Dr. Irving Linn, Bram's English Professor at Yeshiva University, and his wife Clara came to

the hospital with their car to escort us and the new baby from the hospital to our tiny apartment. Dr. Linn taught English to a group of older students that included Bram and Rabbi Arthur Schneier. Was I happy that they accompanied us home. Our Debby needed her diaper changed and we did not know what to do. Clara Linn cheerfully took over and we were most grateful for her instruction.

At that time it was common for people to take a nurse for three days to handle the baby and to give the parents a chance to rest. During the day we took care of the baby, and during the night the nurse was on duty. We took a room in the Hargrave Hotel so that we could recover and get some sleep.



When Debby was born, our doctor recommended we take Dr. Schumann as our pediatrician. Before accepting Debby as his patient, he made sure that in the event she was seriously sick on Shabbat or a holiday we would call him. And lo and behold, we fed Debby her first (and last) egg on Shabbat and she promptly had an allergic reaction. We called him and he came over immediately. After we bathed her in warm water and boric acid, she recovered.

Soon after, Dr. Schumann was appointed head of the neo-natal department of Mt. Sinai Hospital. He approached Bram to be head of the *mohalim*. We were happy about this because it would have supplemented our income nicely. Unfortunately, when Bram presented the proposal to the Trustees, they raised a ruckus. They denied him permission to accept the offer. There was nothing to be done.



With little money in our pockets we were looking for a bigger and better apartment. On the second day of Pesach, the Guedalias—the synagogue's capable sexton Judah and his wife Selma-- told us that an apartment in their building had become vacant; the doctor who had lived there had to leave in a hurry. The Guedalias were so kind and sent their son Harris over to tell us. Even though it was still *Yom Tob*, we ran around the corner and in five minutes we decided to take the apartment at 18 West 70th Street. The place was very dirty and a lot of work had to be done, but we were happy to have found an apartment with two bedrooms.



Our Debby was a very smart child. At eight months she surprised us all by speaking. Our delight turned to shock when we realized it was Dutch she was speaking. We quickly switched our spoken language to English, and were thrilled when she proved to be bi-lingual. Debby was a highly allergic child and was more interested in books than in food. Sophie Salomon gave me a very wise suggestion: instead of nagging Debby to eat all the time, I should distribute little plates of healthy food around the house. I did this and sure enough, by the end of the day, the plates were empty; Debby had eaten all the food.

When Debby was three years old, I was pregnant with Judy. We sent Debby to a Jewish pre-school called Beit HaYeled. She would come home with songs and stories and told us how much she loved her teacher "Buddy." In the morning after services Bram took Debby to the school that was situated on 74th Street and Columbus Avenue. In the afternoon, I used to pick her up. One afternoon while trying to cross the street, I slipped on something and fell down. Debby, a very alert child, ran into the street and stopped traffic. She yelled:

"My Mommy fell on my baby!" Many people came to help me to my feet. In life there is always excitement.



With great joy our Judy arrived in March 1955. She was named after my father, Judah, and was born in Doctor's Hospital. The doctor who helped me with both children, Dr. Robert Honig, was very attentive and pleasant. When Judy was born, the eye drops they used at birth against glaucoma missed her eye and made the area around her eye red. They did not let me see her in the first days because in the bed next to me was a woman whose baby was born blind; they were concerned that I might be worried about my baby.

When I had to go to the hospital for the birth of Judy, a neighbor offered to baby-sit Debby for a few days; it was a near disaster. Debby was kept in pajamas for three days without even being given a bath. A friend, Mrs. Deborah Farro for whom I had recently found a very good housekeeper, came to see me and brought Debby a very big doll. Hearing of the caretaking crisis, she took a happy Debby and the doll home until I was released from the hospital, and also hosted Bram for many meals.

My doctor insisted that I take a nurse for two weeks to help with Judy; the dining room became the nursery. The nurse adored her and played with her all day long. Bram could not stand this nurse because she was very nosy. One morning before Passover, Els Bendheim sent me a letter insisting that we spend both seder evenings with them. When the nurse wanted to know what was in the letter, Bram ran out of patience; he was ready to dismiss her. I begged him to calm down because I needed her. I was exhausted. Passover was quickly approaching and there was a lot to be done. It

was not the first time and would not be the last time that I was so very grateful to the Bendheims for their hospitality.



To take little jobs on the outside was nearly impossible for me, but I still tried to do a little work for my former boss, Mr. Moscow, once a week. I used to send my mother a small monthly check to help out a little bit. With two young children to bring up, we did not see our financial situation getting any better and had to suspend the check. It was a difficult decision at a difficult period in our lives.

My family in Suriname was upset. They could not have had any idea of how much we struggled on every front. With our limited means, Bram and I had no other choice but to make our young family the priority. Looking back, it was nothing short of miraculous that we managed as well as we did. To that I credit G-d Almighty and Bram who was a scrupulous bookkeeper. I am indebted to him for his Dutch level-headedness and frugality.

4

The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue

The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, also known as Congregation Shearith Israel (Remnant of Israel), is the oldest Jewish community in the United States, dating back to 1654. Marrying a member of the synagogue staff made me an immediate member of the Shearith Israel family, which included a fascinating and very colorful group of people who greatly enriched my life.

David and Tamar de Sola Pool

When Bram joined the staff of Shearith Israel in 1946, Dr. Pool was on his way to being Minister Emeritus. This was after an illustrious thirty-nine year career as pulpit rabbi, translator of liturgy and prominent American Jew. Mrs. Pool was President of Hadassah and a brilliant and colorful partner to Dr. Pool. They met at an early Zionist Congress where she was the only American-born woman present who spoke a fluent Hebrew. They were remarkable people; their home was always open to everyone. The ladies of the Congregation adored them. Many times when Mrs. Pool was on a

trip in her capacity as president of Hadassah, all the women were standing in line to take care of Dr. Pool. Every Tuesday evening the Pools had an open house with an excellent guest speaker. People sat on the floor and everyone helped with serving the refreshments. There was always a festive atmosphere at these gatherings.

For Succot the Pools invited half the world. While Tamar (pronounced by all as "tay-mar") went to Hadassah meetings, the devoted women of the Sisterhood were cooking the fish she bought and preparing for the Holiday. When hundreds of Holocaust survivors were interred in detention camps in Cypress awaiting immigration to Israel, Mrs. Pool left Dr. Pool in the capable hands of the Sisterhood ladies in order to bring these people a shipload of sewing machines and all kinds of equipment.



The Congregation's gift to Dr. Pool for his 60th birthday was the services of a chauffeur (the incomparable George), along with a car. The day of this gala birthday celebration was bittersweet. During the party, the news came that the husband of the Pool's daughter Naomi had fallen in action in Europe. He was one of the last American casualties of World War II. The news was withheld from the Pools until the end of the party.



Dr. Pool never missed congratulating Bram on his birthday on September 27th; he always came to the door with a book or a little gift. One year the doorbell rang, and there was Dr. Pool holding a

fish and singing *"Lang zal ze leven"* (long may he live) from the little Dutch he had learnt from his grandfather. He was a delightful and charming person.

Tamar

When the first ship arrived from Israel after the establishment of the State, Mrs. Pool arranged for a welcome reception. She asked Bram and me to be in the social hall at a certain time. Bram played the piano as the sailors were escorted in by young Hadassah girls. There was dancing and singing. But Mrs. Pool, the hostess, was not to be found. All of a sudden the door burst open and there was Mrs. Pool and George, with huge baskets of sandwiches and cold drinks. She got a rousing ovation and the party went into full swing. George the chauffeur had a heavy baritone voice and he, accompanied by Bram, sang "Old Man River." The applause said it all. It was an evening never to be forgotten.



Stories abound about Mrs. Tamar de Sola Pool. Bram and I experienced many of these incidents firsthand. Before he was married, Bram used to eat at the Pool's. Once when Dr. Pool was not feeling well, Mrs. Pool asked Bram to come over for lunch and to recite the *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace After Meals). She had a house full of people and the usual light refreshments. He munched a little bit at the Pools and then went to the home of the Salomons, knowing that a substantial plate of delicious food awaited him in their library. Herman kept Bram company while he was eating. According to Herman's comic telling of the story, Bram was mid-bite, holding a chicken drumstick at the

moment that the door suddenly opened and Mrs. Pool entered. Without a moment's hesitation and with a big smile she said: "*Bon Appetit*, Rabbi Cardozo!"



Once a week at 5 o'clock in the morning Mr. David Politi would pick up Tamar to go to the Fulton fish market where she would buy fresh fish. Many times I went with her; it was quite an adventure. All the fishermen knew her. She wore rubber boots and stepped through the water to get directly to the boats that were laden with fish. One day she forgot a crate of fish in the trunk of her car: by the end of the day, an awful smell was detected coming from the car and the offending fish had to be thrown out. She never served much at parties but she had a closet stocked full of canned meat. One morning when Bram came to synagogue, the place was a terrible mess. During the night, the aging cans burst and the contents were all over. No matter what happened, nothing fazed Tamar. She greeted any obstacle or catastrophe with a smile and enlisted the help of the multitudes who admired her.



Once, when Mrs. Pool was in the hospital, she asked me to go into her apartment and bring her some papers she was working on. Mrs. Sophie Salomon always brought stewed dried fruits for people in the hospital; as anyone who has ever been hospitalized knows, this is a much-needed food. I brought Tamar a package of prunes. The next day I picked up some more papers for her. She had arranged with the Bendheims that their chauffeur Sam would pick me up

with her bundle of papers and bring me to the hospital. When I came in the room, no Mrs. Pool. I asked the nurse where Mrs. Pool was and she told me that she was in the W.C. I waited patiently for her and when she came into the room and saw me she said with a huge smile and in her very musical voice, "Irrrrma, your prrrrunes are working."

Doing anything with Mrs. Pool was an adventure. It was fun to be with her because she was such a unique and independent character. She knew many people and often received free tickets to concerts and plays, which she gladly shared with others. Once we were at a show and all of a sudden noticed that Mrs. Pool was gone. After a quick search of the ladies room, we frantically called her home. She answered and explained that she had work to do and slipped out quietly, not wanting to disturb our enjoyment of the evening.

Mrs. Pool was known for her catnaps. Once, at the opening ceremony of a major Jewish conference, Tamar was on the roster of guest speakers and was sitting in the audience. In the middle of a little snooze, she was awakened when hearing her name called and without a moment's hesitation, proceeded down the aisle to the podium. The master of ceremonies had simply listed her name as one of the conference speakers. Reaching the podium, having realized her mistake, she graciously thanked the audience, gave a big smile and returned to her seat to thunderous applause.

One Shabbat, the Swiss-Sephardic philanthropist Nissim Gaon was visiting the synagogue and a special luncheon was held in his honor. To our horror, as he stood at the head table and spoke to the assembled crowd, we saw a cockroach crawling on his lapel. Mrs. Pool was never at a loss for what to do in the most embarrassing situations: she quietly tiptoed to the head table and flicked it off him. We could barely contain our laughter.

There was an apocryphal story (probably authored by Herman Salomon) about Mrs. Pool's resourceful and optimistic nature. Dr. and Mrs. Pool were visiting a tribe in Africa. They listened intently when told about the tribe's unique traditions and way of life. The chief then invited them to join him in his treetop home. Surveying the height of the tree, Mrs. Pool enthusiastically accepted the invitation but asked: "Excuse me, is there an elevator?"



Mrs. Pool (nee Hirschenson) had three illustrious sisters: One was Tehilla Lichtenstein who was the founder/ minister of the Jewish Science movement. She spoke very beautifully and many people went to hear her. Her other sister, Nima Adlerblum, was a well-known writer, educator and early Zionist activist. At the end of her life she resided in a special apartment in the basement of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. I never met the third sister, Esther Taubenhaus, who founded the campus Hillel at Texas A&M University.

In many ways, Mrs. Pool was ahead of her time. She was not very domesticated and was a full partner to her illustrious husband. There are those that say she helped him significantly in his translations. In her later years, she established an Israel-Arab Friendship League. After Dr. Pool became ill and after his death Tamar kept his name alive by always quoting and mentioning him.

The Founding Families

Some of the original founding families of the Spanish Portuguese Synagogue continued their involvement in the synagogue through the generations. The de Sola Mendes family dates back a

long way. Rabbi de Sola Mendes was the rabbi before Dr. David de Sola Pool, who was his cousin. The current generation of Mendeses continue to be passionately involved in the synagogue. Judge Edgar Nathan was the *parnas* (president) when we arrived and later his son Edgar Nathan III took over. At the time of this writing, Edgar Nathan III's son David is the *parnas*.

Judge Nathan's sister, Rosalie Nathan Hendricks, was married to Henry Hendricks from another founding family. Rosalie and I worked together for many years raising funds for Secondary Education in Israel. Today, in Israel, free high school education is taken for granted, but then, it was an additional expense that most poor families could not afford. Rosalie Hendricks was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution as was Mona Oppenheim's mother, Mrs. Ferdinand Oppenheim. They were American patriots who prided themselves in an illustrious lineage. I was told that in 1939, Rosalie and others resigned in protest from the DAR when African-American contralto Marian Anderson was refused permission to sing to an integrated audience at one of their functions. This represented a major crossroads in Afro-American history; shortly thereafter, President and Mrs. Roosevelt invited her to perform on the steps of the Washington Monument.

N. Taylor Phillips, or "Captain Phillips," was the *parnas* in the nineteen-twenties and thirties. He was a hero of WWI and was active in Tammany Hall, the Democratic Party political machine that played a major role in controlling New York City politics and helping immigrants (most notably the Irish) rise up in American politics from the 1790s to the 1960s. He was an impressive figure in the synagogue. We were invited once a year to his country house in Long Beach, sometimes together with the synagogue's executive director Victor Tarry and his first wife Hanna. Before one of these visits, Captain Phillips was looking for a *kasher* place where we could share a meal. He wrote us a note: "I was regretful

that I could not find a place for you...where you could...enjoy the table according to our Laws. One would imagine that in a place in which our people are so numerous it would be otherwise." He was extremely fond of us and took a particular liking to little Debby. In one letter, dated June 1953, he wrote: "I was happy to feel the intimation that little Deborah has so far progressed with her study of Torah that she will be able to assist her dear father on the Fall holidays. That she will rise to his splendid heights is something else again." Mrs. Coon, his niece, cared for him and accompanied him everywhere. When he came to our home during the week, he sent me red roses. In one of his last letters to us he wrote: "...have had some difficulty in schooling her [his cook] in making Portuguese lemon white stewed fish... Otherwise, I continue in my loneliness, living largely in the past. I am not so sure that the recollections of it are not more agreeable than the present world disturbance, but after all, everything is comparative."



A Melting Pot of Special Families

Mixed in with all the blue-blooded American Jews who came from the founding fathers of the congregation, the oldest in the U.S.A., were the other members who came from far and wide. Many were Sephardim and others were Ashkenazim who lived in the neighborhood who were drawn to the synagogue's traditions and stately decorum.

Irving and Ann Elias came from Janina, Greece. The Politis came from Turkey. The Zilkhas, Inys and Nounus came from Iraq and Iran. The Gubbays, Shahmouns and Abrahams came from Iraq,

India, China and Hong Kong. The Lasrys were Moroccan. The Levys and Capsoutos came from Egypt. The Vieras and the Vas Nuneses came from Holland. The Mendes and Corcos families came from Jamaica. Mrs. de Cordova was from Morocco. The Francos came from Rhodes. The Guedalias came from Gibraltar. Mr. Altaras, a schoolmate of Rabbi Abinun and Dr. Gaon of Lauderdale Road synagogue in London, all were refugees from Sarajevo, Yugoslavia. The Sebags came from Morocco. Mr. Pinchas was from Bukhara. Joe Maleh was a Syrian Jew. Although many of these Sephardim grew up with a *nusah* that was different from that of Spanish and Portuguese, they all grew to love the services and embraced the *minhag* as their own.

Ashkenazim fell in love with the synagogue as well. Many were German Jews who were attracted to the orderliness and grandeur of the service—Florence Haas, the Unterbergs, the Berliners, the Habermans, the Hymans, the Gruenebaums. There were others as well, such as Clara and Marcel Halpern, who were from Roumania. Even in the earlier years, prominence in synagogue affairs was not a function of whether you were Sephardi or Ashkenazi. When I first came, Sam and Molly Schneirson were a leading family. Through their close friendship with the de Sola Pools, they joined the synagogue and became very active. It was they who financed the re-carpeting of the large synagogue and countless other projects. Bram taught their son Joel and daughter Judy their *aleph-bet.* Judy was a bridesmaid at our wedding. Together with Ivan Salomon they paid Bram to chaperone Joel and Herman Salomon to Israel after it was declared a State. Joel Schneirson and Arnie Goldfarb started the Young People's Group that flourished in the synagogue for many years.



The Guedalias

Judah and Selma Guedalia lived in our apartment building with their two lovely children Harris and Rose. It was thanks to them that we found our apartment. Judah was the sexton of the synagogue. With the *minhag* being his guide, he kept the day-to-day operations of the services running smoothly. All matters relating to death and burial were also in his realm. He told us once that he limited his hospital visits to congregants lest they worry in what capacity he came by! His wife Selma and I often commiserated with each other on synagogue matters, but all four of us also shared a lot of laughter. We had good times around the piano with Judah, a professional jazz pianist. Harris became a rabbi and a lawyer and married Judy Bendheim. After a brief stint at the synagogue he moved on to Israel where he became involved in numerous projects. His wife Judy is an extremely well-respected neuropyschologist at Shaarei Zedek Hospital. They have lovely and accomplished children and grandchildren. Rose married Henry Edinger and the two of them continue to be devoted members of our community. Rose, as her name might have predicted, became a professional florist. Their son Zachariah inherited his grandfather's musicality and masterfully recites the *zemirot* on Shabbat morning.

The Minhag

In our early years at the synagogue, it was a great source of frustration for Bram that the synagogue Board was often more devoted to the *minhag* (traditions) than to *halakhah* (Jewish law.) At that time, the members of the Ritual Committee were generally not very learned in Jewish matters. When Bram first came, there were funerals with open caskets, cookies served in the synagogue had no rabbinical supervision and almost nobody holding the Torah scrolls on *Kol Nidre* night wore non-leather shoes. I remember somebody commenting to me: "Before you immigrants arrived, we never had

to order kosher cookies!" Unlike me, it was not in Bram's nature to be confrontational but he was dismayed by many things. Some members of the choir were non-Jews who made no secret of going to the corner Cuban café for a coffee during Torah reading .

Bram was a living bridge between the Old World and the New—between the mother synagogue of Amsterdam and New York. When Bram tried to introduce melodies from his native Amsterdam he was refused because it wasn't part of the New York *minhag*. This saddened him, because he was so eager to keep these melodies alive.

In later years, the situation changed and certain ancient *minhagim* were abandoned, something that distressed him greatly. *Hakafot* for the deceased (circuits around the coffin during which certain psalms are read) were no longer performed unless requested explicitly.

Bram was devoted to the *minhag* but was not blinded by it. He loved Ashkenazic *hazzanut*, encouraged the girls to go to Lincoln Square Synagogue, and took the whole Sephardic notion of gravidade (solemnity and hauteur) with a grain of salt. In his own quiet way, he upheld the traditions as well as the highest standards of *halakhah*. His Torah reading was second to none. Although he could go through the entire Torah in his sleep, he was always prepared scrupulously for every *parashah*, each and every week. At the end of his life, he refused to go up to the *tebah* with his walker and so longer read the Torah; his beloved "Pisa" *tikkun* remained nonetheless on his bedside table.



When Bram was leading the service on the *tebah*, I was with him for every syllable. Though I had never received a formal Jewish education, I knew the service well and enjoyed participating and

responding. In the beginning, I had been given a seat on the top row of the women's section. The Board wanted to be sure that I did not mistake myself for the Minister's wife who had a front row seat. This did not sit well with me. On my own initiative, I situated myself and my daughters in the front row, next to Mrs. De Cordova, and we all coexisted very nicely.

The constitutions of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogues around the world use the term *hazzan* to refer to the ritual leader of the congregation. In our tradition, so much rests on the shoulders of the clergy—*hazzanut* as well as other ministerial duties. In Ashkenazic synagogues, the roles of the rabbi and the *hazzan* are clearly separate. Since Bram was not the minister of Shearith Israel, until he was 70 years old he was not given the full title of "*Hazzan.*" For years he was called "Assistant *Hazzan*" and then "Associate *Hazzan.*" Despite the title or lack thereof, he performed marriages, burials and gave eloquent eulogies. This was one of the subtle humiliations he had to endure for almost the entirety of his working life at the synagogue. He accepted it a lot better than I did. For him the real sustenance resided in the love and admiration he received from serving G-d and the congregants.

Sewing Circle

In the 1950s through the early '70s, the Sewing Circle was something of an institution at the synagogue. The ladies of the Sewing Circle met every Tuesday morning from 9-2. This was an era when handiwork was greatly valued. The women, mostly middle-aged and older, sewed clothes for the poor and made stuffed dolls for children in hospitals. Bella Montezinos and Sarah Franco made beautiful Torah mantles. Florence Haas worked diligently on many projects along with Bess Ginsburg, Rose Harte, Rosalie Krieger, Elsie Adelman, Dorothy Ain, the Defez/Touriel sisters, Anne Elias,

Regina Franco, Mathilde Emanuel, Suzy Aboodi, Ruth Schulson, Mrs. Vas Nunes, Alice Tarry and Laura Capelluto to name just a few. These were diligent ladies who prided themselves on their skillfulness in the home arts and who accomplished a great deal.

There were also several Dutch ladies from Holland, survivors of the war, who came every week. At twelve o'clock there would be a lunch break. Everyone brought a dairy sandwich; the Sisterhood provided fruit, cake and coffee.

This was the time when the ladies from Holland would gather and reminisce in Dutch. One of the Dutch ladies loved to gossip and recount stories from Amsterdam before the war. She told a story about a beautiful lady in Amsterdam, who, rumor had it, was carrying on with her physician. She wondered what had happened to this lady. All of a sudden there was quiet in the room; a woman got up and asked: "Tell me something. Would you recognize this woman if you saw her?" She then introduced herself as "the lady" referred to in the story. She survived the war and was remarried and lived in New York. The storyteller's face turned red as a beet. She cried out: "May my tongue fall out! Where can I hide?!" We all sat there shocked. 85% of Dutch Jews had been killed by Hitler. The woman who told the story never imagined that the subject of her juicy tale was alive, let alone in the same room. It was an awkward moment, but when our lunch break was over everyone composed themselves and went back to work.

The sewing circle evolved into what Dorothy Ain named the "Tuesday-Do-Something" group. Every week, Mrs. Marcia Pinchas, a retired translator for the United Nations, came during the lunch hour and gave us an update on current affairs. Eventually the group petered out. Many of the devoted ladies passed away. The new generation of women either had jobs or were unschooled in sewing. It was a new era; the world had changed.

5

The Trials and Travails of Community Servants

This is the chapter that I have wanted to write for so long—out of the need to get things off my chest and let people know how hard it was for us, as well as show that one can accomplish a lot despite the obstacles. My daughters have urged me to put all these stories aside, but I cannot. Without these stories, it would be hard to explain our lives and our perseverance in the face of many challenges. The coming generations have many issues to deal with and I hope that this proves helpful and instructive to them.



The initial honeymoon period in the synagogue was wonderful, personally and professionally. We were welcomed by one and all. The summer after we married, Rabbi and Mrs. Gerstein rented a country house in Livingston Manor that they graciously lent us for a week. Amy and Lou were our contemporaries and later joined us

at the cottage. It was very pleasant even though we did not have a lot in common. Both Bram and I were foreigners; Amy and Lou were American-born and bred. Notwithstanding the cultural differences, we looked forward to a good working and social relationship. Unfortunately, a hard road lay ahead for all of us.

After his first year, Bram's situation within the synagogue became highly politicized. Dr. Gerstein was to be the successor to Dr. Pool and everything was done to advance this goal. Suddenly Bram was perceived as a threat. It is impossible to think of Bram as a threatening person but the situation we all found ourselves in did not allow for calm and rational thinking on anyone's part. With the wisdom of hindsight, the heavy handedness of the Trustees undercut Dr. Gerstein from the outset and never truly gave him the chance to fully realize his talents in the synagogue.

Dr. Gerstein's appointment itself was fraught with political implications. He was a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary of the Conservative movement; this raised concerns about the direction the synagogue was taking. The Spanish and Portuguese synagogue has always dealt with "reforming" forces. Even in the time of Benjamin Cardozo, future Chief Justice, a vote was taken whether or not to install an organ in the synagogue. Though not religiously observant, Benjamin Cardozo, (at that time a lawyer), famously used the thunder and lightening outside the meeting room that night to inspire the Board to stand strong against the forces of reform.

In the ensuing years, the Jewish Theological Seminary had become a force on the New York Jewish landscape and in fact its establishment as an originally Orthodox institution took place under the roof of Shearith Israel. After its founding, JTS evolved into a Conservative institution which sought to make inroads into the community. Dr. Gerstein was the top of his class at JTS and was extremely musical—a requirement for the "*hazzan*/minister" of Shearith Israel. For

some, his appointment was seen as a welcome alignment with JTS; for others, it signaled an unwelcome trend. He himself made no changes in any aspect of the service and faithfully maintained the status quo which included using the microphone as had Dr. Pool before him. He mastered the Spanish and Portuguese liturgy, no small feat for someone who grew up in the Ashkenazic tradition.



Dr. and Mrs. Pool were a dynamic duo in every way. Dr. Pool had many accomplishments to his credit including the translation of the Rabbinical Council of America *siddur*; Mrs. Pool, as national president of Hadassah, was a force in her own right. The two of them showed great affection for the members of the synagogue and were in turn loved by the community. This would have been a hard act for anyone to follow.

Both Bram and I were outgoing and very much enjoyed the company of the congregants. We regularly had people at our table. I grew up in a home filled with people, where synagogue life was central; it was a natural role for me to open my home and extend a helping hand. Bram's family was also synagogue-centered. They lived across the street from the Amsterdam Portuguese synagogue where his father was one of the choirmasters and where Bram said his first *haftarah* at age eight and was a youth leader. These very strengths—essentially our only assets in life—were perceived incorrectly as our usurping the role of the rabbi. We had no interest in Dr. Gerstein's position but a concerted effort was made to limit Bram's growth. Bram was taking *shiurim* at Y.U. to pursue a college degree. He already had a teacher's certification from the Sephardic Seminary in Amsterdam and earned a *semikhah* (rabbinical ordination) from the Central Sephardic Jewish Community of America

signed by three leading Sephardic rabbis, Rabbis Alcalay, Kassin, Maslaton. The synagogue Trustees told him that he must not continue his studies. He was also not allowed to work as a *mohel.* I was also forbidden to work to add to our meager income and was even told that it was unbecoming to sing in the community choir led by Siegfried Landau.

When we asked for a raise because we could not makes ends meet, we were criticized for sending our children to Manhattan Day School, where they got an excellent Jewish education and for sending our children to Jewish summer camps. We were told that there was nothing wrong with letting them play in Central Park for the summer. At that time, the park was a hangout for drug addicts and other unsavory characters. The Board members had one standard for their own children and another for ours. We fought hard to give our girls the best of everything.

One memorable incident stands out in my mind: Once after Bram requested a raise we were instructed to visit the treasurer and to bring along our budget and list of expenses. After he looked everything over he asked us: "Do you *have* to eat so much meat?" He found our meat bill much too high. Many Board members had no concept of how expensive kosher meat was, and didn't understand what it meant to be an Orthodox family that was committed to hosting people around the Shabbat/Festival table week in and week out. Only one Trustee dared to break ranks when he told us that he understood why we wanted to give our children the best Jewish education possible. This was a rare occurrence. More often, we were berated. Sometimes I reached my breaking point. In anger I answered them back because it was too much to bear. Bram never liked these outbursts because he felt that they soured his relationship with the people he worked with on a daily basis.

The Tercentenary marking the arrival of the Jews in America was to be celebrated under the leadership of Shearith Israel, the oldest congregation in America. They organized a very big dinner with President Eisenhower as keynote speaker. I will never forget this dinner. The morning of the dinner Bram was under the weather and stayed home from the service. Later, when he arrived at the dinner, the *parnas* asked him why he made an appearance now if he didn't come to services in the morning. He threatened to cut him out of the musical/liturgical program. Thankfully, this did not come to pass. I, however, was seated at the table with the janitorial staff. While Sidney and Cassie, the custodial couple, were very dear to us and far out-classed many people on the Board, a clear message was communicated as to our standing in the community. It was hurtful.

To this very day I do not know how we did it. When I was highly pregnant with Judy, Bram was going through a terrible time with the Trustees. They claimed that he was uncooperative and called him in to see the *parnas* in his judicial chambers. It was a very cold day and I accompanied Bram downtown and waited for him in a cafeteria nearby, sipping a cup of hot cocoa. I sat there by myself for two hours; it felt like a whole week. When Bram came to pick me up, he turned colors telling me how they blamed him for everything and more; he was completely beside himself. The night before the meeting Robert Salomon had called Bram and given him the following advice: whatever they say, stay quiet and be polite. As difficult as it must have been for Bram to keep his feelings to himself, he followed Robert's advice. It seems that after Bram left the office the *parnas* turned to Robert Salomon and said: "I never knew Bram was such a fine fellow." Judy was born shortly after this incident; we decided to sidestep any unpleasant confrontation with the Trustees and named her in the Sephardic Synagogue in Long Beach rather than at Shearith Israel, where we had named Debby.

One memorable year, just a few days before *Shabbat HaGadol*, the Shabbat before Passover, Bram had an infection in his nose; it was a life-threatening situation and the ENT specialist Dr. Lehman forbade him to leave his bed or move around after giving him a large dose of penicillin. I had the unpleasant task of going to the synagogue office to tell them about Bram's perilous condition and that he could not read *parashah* on *Shabbat HaGadol*. I had taken Debbie with me. Judy was home in the crib. The fury that greeted me, bearing this news, was indescribable. I was asked to provide them with Dr. Lehman's telephone number. Stunned and at a loss for words, I dutifully provided the information and was unable to respond to the verbal and emotional assault. No one could ever accuse Bram of trying to shirk his responsibility, especially when it came to reading the Torah! How could they suspect him of any wrongdoing? After I left the office, the doctor was contacted and asked to make a special visit to see Bram the following morning (*Shabbat HaGadol*) and to determine if it was possible for him to read the Torah.

The moral of this story as it unfolded was that G-d works in wonderous ways: Dr. Lehman came the next morning—and thank G-d he did. First, while he was crossing the street to come to our house, he met his cousin Robert Salomon, who asked him where he was going so early in the morning. When Robert heard the story of how they disbelieved Bram, he was infuriated. Most importantly, when Dr. Lehman saw Bram's condition, he immediately gave him a double dose of penicillin to stop this life-threatening infection from traveling to his brain.

I will never forget this Shabbat. After Synagogue services our living room was filled with people who came to inquire about Bram's condition. It cheered us up greatly and we were so thankful for this display of concern and friendship. Thank G-d, by Shabbat's end, the infection finally began to resolve itself.

There were times we were so frustrated by our financial and political situation that we considered leaving. We were approached by synagogues in Cuba, Curacao, Suriname and Bussem, a suburb of Amsterdam. The offer to come to Bussem—from our dear friend Sol van Gelder—included a house, a car and a generous salary. Bram shared the offer with some trustees who used it to help Bram receive a modest increase in salary. Each time an opportunity arose we weighed the pros and cons. We invariably came to the conclusion that it was worth enduring these difficult circumstances in order to insure that our children receive the best Jewish education possible.

The Gaon Era

In the 1970s, Dr. Salomon Gaon, the Chief Rabbi of the Sephardic Communities in the British Commonwealth, and his wife Regina went to Brazil on a vacation. On their way back they stopped in New York and visited our synagogue. A big reception was given in their honor. People took to them immediately and felt very warmly towards the lively Ladino-speaking couple. Ivan Salomon and a large following started to work on the idea of getting the Gaons to come to this country so that he could join the clergy of our synagogue. Understandably, this was a very threatening prospect for the incumbent rabbi and caused great strife in the synagogue community.

We became very close to the Gaons for many reasons. We had much in common: Dr. Gaon was from Sarajevo and both he and Bram lost their entire families in the war. Regina was from Gibraltar and both she and I came from small, insular communities. We had similar dispositions and enjoyed the company of others greatly. We commiserated with each other about the problems we had within our own communities and for the first time, felt that we had colleagues we could be honest with and relate to. We opened our social

circles to them and they did the same for us. "Uncle Salomon" and "Auntie Regina" were like family to our children. We attended Raquel's wedding in London. Years later, Dr. Gaon and Bram both officiated under the *huppah* when Judy and Sid married.

With his home base in London, Dr. Gaon traveled back and forth from England to New York. When he was in New York he spent a lot of time in our house. Whenever Regina couldn't join him, Dr. Gaon ate with us and was in touch every day. We sometimes shopped together for their grandchildren. Regina and I were very close. We traveled together and saw each other in Israel, England, and Holland. When in Israel, there were many meetings that we all attended; it was a lot of fun. Nissim Gaon from Switzerland, president of the World Sephardi Federation, usually made big parties to which we were invited. We once stayed at the Gaon home on Ashworth Road in London for ten days. Literally from early morning till late at night their home was filled with assorted people, dignitaries and regular congregants alike. Shabbat was a twenty-four hour celebration in the synagogue and around their table. *Habdalah* was particularly memorable; Dr. Gaon sang the Ladino *El Dio Alto* and blessed each and every person gathered round the long table in their dining room.



The Synagogue's relationship with Dr. Gaon lasted three years. The synagogue was split on the issue of hiring him. The London congregation had already been paid a large amount of money for Dr. Gaon's services; Dr. Gaon himself did not get a penny from it. After many discussions, Dr. Gaon decided against coming to New York as the Rabbi. Later, when Dr. Gaon left London, he opted to become the head of the Sephardic Studies Program at Yeshiva University.

With the help of their friends, the Gaons acquired an apartment on Central Park West and ultimately settled in New York.



Everything must be seen in an historical and cultural perspective. Shearith Israel, as the oldest congregation in the U.S., was very American. When we first came, we were as much as told that since Bram had an "accent" he could not speak—even at the *Kiddush* after services on Shabbat. Dr. Gaon was in many ways a bridge between the old era at Shearith Israel and a new one that was more tolerant and welcoming of cultural differences and even accents. Dr. Gaon had a heavy accent; he was born in Sarajevo. And yet, as Chief Rabbi of the Sephardim of the British Commonwealth, he spoke a King's English. Whether it was the force of Dr. Gaon's personality or the fact that over time things had changed is not clear. Shearith Israel had somehow embraced a less rigidly American and a more worldly outlook.

Many years passed and little by little things were getting better for us. More and more the Congregation recognized our abilities and all the things we were doing. Over time, the need for a new young rabbi became acute. Rabbi Harris Guedalia, the rabbi-lawyer son of Selma and Judah Guedalia and the son-in-law of Charlie and Els Bendheim, spent two years with the synagogue. He moved on and eventually raised a wonderful family and settled in Israel. Soon thereafter, Rabbi Marc Angel came on the scene. He came from the Sephardic community of Seattle, Washington and was a prize-winning student at Yeshiva University. He arrived at a time that the college-age son of Edgar and Ruth Nathan, Arthur, had become ill and died. With his quiet reserve, Rabbi Angel was the minister that the Nathan family needed in their time of loss. A new chapter in the synagogue's history was beginning.

6

The Summer Months

When the girls were very young, we had to take our yearly vacation in June. This obligated us to spend the hottest months in the city. Once the children were in school until the end of June, we arranged to spend time away from the hot, humid city in July or August, even if that meant that I was alone with the children for part of the time. Bram had three to four weeks vacation but was often on call for emergencies. Sometimes we stayed local and rented a house in Long Beach, Long Island. For a few summers, the girls attended Jewish sleep away camps. We scrimped and saved so that several summers we traveled to Europe—most particularly to Holland and Israel.

Long Beach

Bram and I were definitely "city people," but when summer came to New York, we wanted to get away from the smog and the heat. Many friends such as the Salomons, the Bendheims, the Yochai Family, David and Julia Politi, Helen and Jack Habib spent their summers or lived year round in Long Beach, Long Island. It was

less than an hour's trip on the Long Island Railroad and its proximity to the city made it perfect for Bram, who sometimes would be called back to Manhattan. With the gracious help of Helen Habib, we twice rented a little place for a portion of the summer. Bram had met Helen's husband Jack in our synagogue when they still lived in the Bronx. He was Turkish and loved *hazzanut*. They were like parents to us. Their home was always open and we made many friends through them.

Long Beach had everything we needed: a Sephardic synagogue, good friends and most importantly Debbie and Judy had their friends Aviva and Edna Bendheim to play with in addition to the Merkins, the Traurings and other lovely children. The Glucksons, members of the synagogue, had a kids' clothing factory and outfitted the girls with new bathing suits every year. We bought the girls second-hand bicycles. In New York they rode them in Central Park; out in Long Beach, they had more freedom of movement and could ride on the sidewalks around the neighborhood.

We would go to the beach or the municipal swimming pool every day and on rainy days the kids would watch a movie at the local movie theatre. One year, they had a Classics comic book club. Mrs. Bendheim, always the educator, hired Rabbi Geller, one of the finest teachers at Manhattan Day School, to come to Long Beach and teach the girls *Pirkei Abot* (Sayings of the Fathers). One year the Franco clan, members of Spanish and Portuguese synagogue who originated in Rhodes and the Congo, rented a little house not far from us and hosted lively parties all the time. Sylvette Franco and I were very close. She helped me out once a week when I had to go to the city to visit the dentist; the kids would play at her house and she would drive me to the train station and pick me up again.

Bram had only three weeks vacation and could not stay with us all the time. It was a lonely existence. I would sit at night and do my

embroidery for hours. At that time I made many beautiful tablecloths. Bram could occasionally take a day and come see us, but Friday morning at 5 o'clock he had to leave for the city. I used those early morning hours to make *hallot* for us, the Habibs, the Francos and many other neighbors. It was a big task; at that time we had no kneading machines to do the work for us.



One year we rented the place of Mrs. Rosannes and shared it with Mathilde (Matika) Emmanuel and her lovely teenaged daughter Esme. Matika's sister Susan Aboodi also joined us as did Matika's husband Jack who came for weekends. It was a particularly nice summer and we all enjoyed each other. Friends of my parents from Suriname, Jet and Jacques Mesquita, also stayed with us one summer in Long Beach while they were in America. Annette Grajower, a good friend who was widowed at a young age, joined us in Long Beach while her children Faye and Moshe were in camp. On Sundays I cooked a big pot of Nassi Goreng (an Indonesian *rijstaffel* dish popular in Suriname), and many of our friends would come to eat. The Abrahams, David Duque and his wife Rose Meldola would drive up, spend the day and join us for dinner.

On Shabbat mornings we would either go to the Sephardic Synagogue or Bachurei Chemed, nicknamed "BaCh," a lively Young Israel type synagogue. We would then come home, sometimes with friends, have lunch, sleep a while and spend the rest of the day with the Bendheims. We were always welcome to sit on the balcony facing the bay where it was nice and cool. Bobbing outside on the bay was their sailboat, named "The Seven B's" in honor of the seven Bendheim children. During the weekdays as well, the Bendheim home was a relaxed, welcoming household with all kinds of kids

running in and out, swimming, playing ball or tennis. "Bobo" (Mrs. Nussbaum), who had worked for Els's mother, oversaw the household and the cooking in Long Beach as she did on Central Park West. She owed her life to the Salomons who took her with them to Montreal, out of harm's way during the war. Her sister, who stayed behind in Holland to take care of young Robert Salomon, perished. Robert miraculously was in Canada visiting his parents when the Nazis invaded Holland. Unable to return to Holland, his life was saved.

The Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach

Whenever Bram was with us he would participate in the services at the Sephardic Synagogue. At one point Mr. Ivan Salomon asked Bram to do some teaching, which he did with pleasure. The Sephardic Synagogue found a wonderful young rabbi from Morocco, Rabbi Asher Abittan. He was a fine man with a beautiful voice who soon married a lovely Ashkenazic girl and had four beautiful boys. They worked very hard to put them through school and send them to college. The oldest son Meyer became a well-known heart specialist, one became a dermatologist, one became the director of a nursing home and one went into business. All the boys have beautiful voices like their father and one grandchild in particular is a singing prodigy.



Rabbi Abittan always had a big smile on his face. His wonderful personality could be heard in his exquisite voice. In particular, the beautiful melodies that he sang on Friday night, *Hashem Malakh* and *Yigdal*, still ring in my ears. One week Rabbi Abittan was late

for services. He rushed in and apologized profusely. Then, with his usual good humor, he added: "I overslept to prove that I am also human." At the young age of 39, Rabbi Abittan had a massive heart attack. He was in critical condition over Kippur and we all were praying for his speedy recovery. I imagine that his recovery from this heart attack is what inspired one of his sons to become a heart specialist.



In Long Beach we had our share of adventures. One year there were a series of storms which caused massive flooding all over Long Island. It was a sight to see: people floating in small boats through the streets. One erev Tisha b'Ab, Debbie fell off her bike and hurt her elbow. I had suggested she rest, as we would be going to services that night, but she had decided to ride her bike instead. She felt guilty for not listening to me, and so did not tell me about her fall. Right after Tisha b'Ab, Bram's vacation started and we all went to the beach. A big wave hit Debby and her injured arm went out of its socket. We had come on foot and so walked to the doctor's office with Debby screaming in pain. Cars passed us while we were walking, but no one stopped to give us a lift. Her elbow was fractured and she was in a sling for weeks.

One summer an important member of the synagogue, Mr. Kadouri Zilkha, died and we had to return to New York in a hurry. All the cars of Riverside Memorial Chapel had to be polished and made ready for the funeral. The vehicle they sent us to travel back to New York with our children and our luggage was the van they used to transport bodies from the home to the chapel. It was raining cats and dogs and we were shivering like frogs in that unheated car. It was an experience not to be forgotten.

Summer Camp

Once the girls started school, we decided to send them to Jewish summer camp. They were both very sociable and enjoyed the company of other children. It also offered Bram and me a bit of time alone together and an opportunity to accomplish certain things. One year, I needed minor surgery and couldn't imagine how the household could handle my absence during the school year and with Bram working.

Debby went to Camp Massad when she was six and came back brimming with Hebrew songs and Jewish knowledge. How she got there was a story in itself. In the late spring, Bram had officiated at the funeral of a member of the Querido family, Dutch people, and met Shlomo Shulsinger, founder of Massad, an innovative Hebrew-speaking camp. They were starting a younger bunk and were undersubscribed. He offered to let Debby, who had just finished first grade, come for the entire summer, free of charge.

When Debby was nine and Judy was six, we sent them for a month to HiLi White Lake. Although both were very excited to go, I was worried that little Judy would be homesick. One day we received a very unhappy letter from her. Luckily, visiting day came shortly thereafter. Instead of finding a clingy, homesick child, we saw a child enjoying herself immensely. The counselors discovered—too late—that all the children in her bunk decided to play a joke on their parents by writing those letters.

When Yeshiva University opened Camp Morasha, we registered the girls. We were very excited about the prospect of the girls being in a Y.U. environment. The rabbinic staff was incredible: Dr. Norman Lamm, Rabbi Rabinowitz; Professor Hershkovitz, Rabbi Alter Metzger, Rabbi Oratz. The girls came home inspired and enriched. That first summer was the beginning of an incredible success story;

Camp Morasha continues to this day to be an outstanding summer camp and kollel program. Many of today's Modern Orthodox leaders are products of Camp Morasha.

Y.U. Torah Leadership Seminar and our Friendship with the Finks of Scranton

In 1964, my husband and I were invited by Dr. Abe Stern to attend the Summer Y.U. Torah Leadership Seminar held on the grounds of Camp Morasha in late August, as part of a new initiative to attract not-yet observant Sephardi Youth. Abe Stern was a remarkably gifted individual, a gentle but visionary pioneer in the area of outreach, who directed Y.U.'s Community Service Division. Hundreds of non-observant youth from across North America became religious through Y.U.'s Summer and Winter Seminars. Many were public school students who, as a direct result of their experiences at Seminar, went on to enroll in Yeshiva University and Stern College.

Debby and Judy were campers in Camp Morasha (also a creation of Y.U.'s Community Services Division) and so we arranged for them to stay over in nearby Scranton, PA for the few days between camp and the beginning of "Seminar." Thus began our close friendship with Rose and Sam Fink of Scranton. Their daughter Miriam was Debby's counselor and her sister Nancy (now Rabbi Kenneth Hain's wife) was Judy's junior counselor. They invited the girls to come home with them until Seminar. The Finks hosted our girls with their characteristic warmth. We visited them in Scranton, and they, in turn, visited us when they came to New York. In later years the Finks, who owned a bakery, would send us their most delicious parve custard pies on a regular basis, as their way of making sure our family and many Shabbat guests would experience their sweetness and hospitality.

Holland

As a result of the war, Bram had been left an orphan. His parents, two brothers, uncles, aunts and almost all his cousins were murdered in the death camps. His middle brother Arie (Aron) was one of the first to be caught in a razia (a roundup) in front of the Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam. He was sent to Mauthausen and was never heard from again. Particularly tragic was what happened to Bram's beloved younger brother Ies; on the morning of his wedding to Lea a'Cattan, Ies was deported. They never married. Ies perished and Lea survived. After the war, she was deathly ill with TB and other ailments that were to plague her throughout her life. While in the hospital she wrote a letter to Bram telling him of everything that happened and gave it to a soldier who mailed it for her. Bram proceeded to send her all kinds of supplies—wool and peanut butter that she shared with other survivors. During his first vacation from the synagogue in NY he went to Holland to see Lea and then to Belgium to see Sala and Dan Gokkes, Lea's cousins.

De Kinderen van Palache

After the war, Lea married Leo Palache, another Holocaust survivor who came from an extremely prestigious Portuguese family in Amsterdam. Bram remembered teaching members of the Palache family *haftarot* before the war. During the war, Leo was instrumental in hiding many of the important artifacts of the Amsterdam synagogue before he himself was shipped to concentration camp. For Bram, Leo and Lea were like true family. They were his only connection with the world of his youth that was brutally destroyed. We made a point of spending time with them as a family in the summers. They housed us and fed us for many weeks. *Shabbatot* were very festive and were filled with many wonderful guests and discussion of synagogue matters and old times. Tante Esther (sister of Leo's father) came every Friday night. She was a nurse by

profession and never married. Dark-skinned and with a royal bearing, she looked like a true Sephardic aristocrat. She was very much committed to the Sephardic traditions and way of life.

In 1963, we came to Amsterdam and hosted a festive reception for our Amsterdam friends. This was a belated celebration of Bram's "homecoming."

We planned many outings together with the Palaches. We made a fun activity of visiting Bram's ancestors' graves in Ouder Kerk on de Amstel. We shopped for the children's school clothing there and spent a wonderful afternoon with the Vegas, the cemetery's caretakers.

Lea was a great chauffeur and at the wheel she felt very happy. Several times she and I went to Antwerp for *sheitels* and occasionally we bought the same dress. We were close and spent a lot of time talking and laughing with each other.



In the summer of 1963, our family, minus Bram who had to go back to New York, traveled together with the Palaches to the South of France (Croix de Cannes). We rented two apartments; the Palache flat housed the kitchen for meat products and I had the flat for milk products. We had a great time together. Every morning early we used to go with the kids for croissants and every day we met a little Sephardic man 'Sjimon' who sold peanuts and waited for us to come by. On Friday mornings we went to Nice to eat a warm luncheon and to take cold cuts back with us for Shabbat, along with French bread and melons. It was great fun for the kids. In the daytime we went to the beautiful clean beaches and in the evening we

would sit in the café on the beach. The air was fresh, the sky was a beautiful blue and the surroundings were magnificent.

When we came to Amsterdam and the Palaches could not house us, we rented rooms in Huise Katz, a bed and breakfast near their home. On Shabbat, rain or shine, we would make the long walk from Michaelangelostraat to the Synagogue. We occasionally stopped at someone's house on the way back and had *kiddush*. After a good hour we arrived at the Palaches. A delicious Dutch Shabbat lunch was waiting for us; fried fish, delicious bread, cheese, herring, raisin bread and much more was laid out on a beautiful table. Many people came—the Aronsons, other community members and visitors from abroad, and it was always a jolly group. For dessert we had strawberries with whipped cream and sometimes ice cream.

There were many people in the Palache house at all times, both guests and young boarders. The children Yehudah (Hoetie), Avram (Avrametje or Ametje) and Mirjam always had visitors in their midst, including us. Several families sent their kids to live at the Palache home to experience a rich Jewish life and to attend school in Amsterdam. Leo was an extremely capable person who was as well-versed in the art of cooking as in Jewish history and politics. He was the director of C.I.A. (Central Israel Actie)—the equivalent of UJA—and raised millions for the State of Israel. Leo was high-strung and chain-smoked to his dying day. Lea was a lively, short woman with an alternately cheerful and worried temperament. Despite her good humor, she suffered terribly from debilitating asthma, a legacy of her years in concentration camps.

Nowadays, people talk about their Holocaust experience. In the 1950s and 60s the experience was still too raw and most people did not speak openly. Many people including our daughter Judy's in-laws went through this terrible time. Her father-in-law Joseph Tenenbaum had his memoirs *Legacy and Redemption* published by

the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. The introduction to this book was written by Joe's close friend Elie Wiesel who was one of the first people to speak about the Holocaust in public. His wife Gena Meisels Tenenbaum is a sculptor who, amongst other subject matter, has created works of art inspired by her wartime experiences in hiding. Her art was recently part of an exhibition at Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem.

Leo and Lea rarely talked about their war experiences. It was only after many years that their children asked how our families were related. Their parents had never explained our connection to them—the fact that Lea almost married Bram's brother. Both Lea and Leo have now passed away. Lea and I were very close until her last moment and I miss her very much. We spoke daily, especially during the last days of her life. I was not in a position to go to Holland to see her one last time. Her death affected me greatly and I cannot help it that when I think and talk about her my eyes fill with tears. It is gratifying to know that the Palache children are close with each other and still maintain contact with me. Leo and Lea will always be in my heart and I will always think of them with love for the good times we spent together.



On a lighter note, one summer when we were visiting Amsterdam, I was invited to the home of a family that Bram knew from before the war. We had been invited to dine at their home as a couple many times but I always made excuses that we had trouble with our digestion and were on strict diets. The truth was that I couldn't imagine eating from a kitchen that was not so clean. Bram didn't particularly notice these things. The wife was very hospitable and one afternoon invited a group of women, myself included, for a tea party. After

lively socializing, she announced that she was serving a home-baked apple pie. The hostess served the tea and then began searching high and low for the apple pie. Throughout this time, their pussycat was sitting contently on the piano watching us. All of a sudden the cat stood up and there was the pie. Without a fuss, she served the pie with half of the women refusing, insisting that it was far too fattening. Lea and I were sitting there, slightly horrified, and also politely refused. We dared not make eye contact with each other for fear of breaking out in laughter.

The Bos Family

Bram always spoke about his uncle—Oom Joseph ("Jo"—pronounced "Yo" in Dutch) and Tante Tilly. They were well-to-do people who regularly paid Bram's family's rent and provided his family with whatever they needed. Bram's father was a professional violinist who had to resort to playing at parties, shoemaking and collecting charity boxes to make a living; he was unable to take a position with an orchestra because he was *shomer Shabbat.* Oom Jo was Bram's mother's brother and a good Ashkenazi. Bram always recalled how his Ashkenazic grandfather Bos taught him the night prayer *"HaMalakh HaGoel"* in a heavy Ashkenazic accent. The Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam were known as *"meshuggene Portuguese"* because many were quite difficult and eccentric. According to Bram, the fact that his mother came from an Ashkenazic family was responsible for his sanity!

All these wonderful people were gassed in Sobibor. One of Oom Jo's children, Sam, survived in hiding. Sam's future wife Ruth (Waterman) worked with Lea a'Cattan (Palache) in the CIS (Central Israelitsche Jewish Hospital). She was present when Bram's brother Ies came to see Lea before he was deported to Westerbork on the

way to Sobibor. That fateful day was not only his birthday but was to be their wedding day.

Whenever we were in Holland we visited the Bos Family in Leyden where Sam, a medical doctor, was also Professor of Pediatrics at University of Leyden. Always interested in things Jewish, Sam studied Semitics after he retired. Bep and Felix Drukker and Max Lapp and his wife were first cousins of Bram who also survived. Their mother was a sister to Bram's mother. Bep had no children and was always happy to take Debby and Judy on her lap to cuddle them. She felt the warmth of her sister Duifje (nicknamed "little dove"), Bram's mother. A funny recollection: Bep and Felix had a big dog named Baasje who was very fond of eating eggs. This became a big expense and Bep did not approve. Nonetheless, Felix bought eggs for his dog and stored them in the garage. To keep her away from his secret stash, he claimed that the garage was infested with mice, effectively insuring that she would never set foot there.

Bep had a brother Aaron who fought in the Resistance in Holland during the war. After the war, he moved to Brazil where he died at the young age of thirty-seven of leukemia. Bep did everything to help her brother's children. When they moved back to Amsterdam Bep always had her niece Sjan in her house. Sjan played with Debby and Judy when we visited Holland. After 42 years, in September 2009, I got a call from Sjan; she was in NY with her husband and could she visit? We spent almost a day together reminiscing. She was surprised at how I remembered every detail of our meeting so many years ago. It was a memorable reunion. Hopefully the connection will continue.

The Arias Family

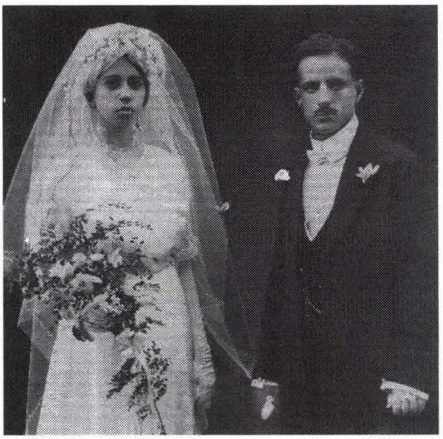
Hetty and Jacques Arias were born in Suriname. Hetty was born into the Morroy family and went to the Hendrik School with us. The Arias children went to another school. Some of the Morroy children were in our class. They had to spend many exhausting hours traveling to school in the city every day from Plantage Groningen, where their father was Governor. The Morroy children were not Jewish. Their father came from a good Jewish home, but since he lived outside of the city, he intermarried. He instilled in his children what his roots were and they fully respected that. The girls were lovely and smart, but the boys were very wild and always fighting after school hours.

Jacques ("Jacqui") Arias, a distant cousin of Hetty's, was brought up in the same synagogue that we attended. When he was in Suriname, Bram taught him for his Bar Mitzvah. His father, Dan, used to blow *shofar* and eventually became a synagogue Trustee. The Arias family did not live very far from us. Jacqui was a very naughty boy; he went to Hebrew School with my brother Ewald and my cousin Sam. They did not behave, and the teacher could not calm them down and keep order in the classroom. They did not learn very much.

We all grew up and went our own ways. After many years we met Jacques Arias again in New York; he would come to the overflow services on the High Holidays in our Synagogue. After Hetty's first husband died, Jacqui went to Holland and visited with her. They decided to get together and after a while they got married. This took place only after she finished her Jewish studies, converted and became a very Orthodox Jew. He had become more lax in his observance, but she brought him back to his roots. Her life became a circle of doing *mitzvot* and celebrating her religion. Many times they stayed in our home in New York and we stayed with them when we were in Holland. They traveled all over the world. Together they

had a good marriage. Jacqui was not feeling well for some time. He was in a great deal of pain. The doctors did their best, but the illness ravaged his body. It became too much for him and one day when his wife went to the dentist he took his life. The shock was very great for Hetty and all of us.

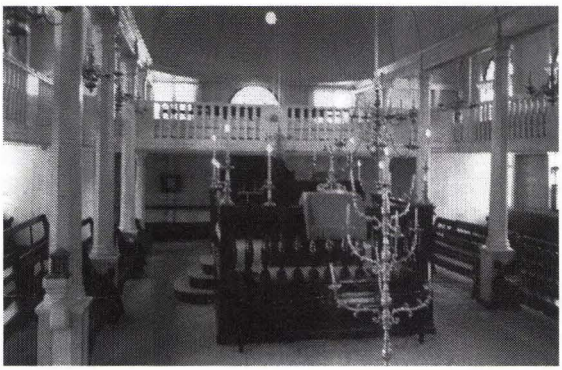
An intrepid survivor of countless changes in her life, Hetty has picked herself up and settled in a retirement village in Florida. There she has re-established her life and enjoys doing good deeds for others and cultivating new friendships. Her resilience is amazing and inspiring.



My parents'
wedding picture.

The Robles family.
I am standing
second from
the left.





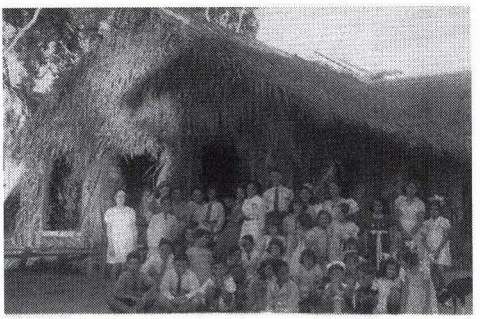
Zedek ve-Shalom
Synagogue.
Now relocated
to the Israel Museum,
Jerusalem.



My family shortly before I left Suriname: From left to right, standing: Me, Jules, Papa, Dorine, Ewald, Letitia. Seated: Harry Emanuels and Mama, who is holding Henry and Yvonne.



Me in *kotomiese* costume. This was how the native Creole Indians dressed on market day.



The *cabana* (succah) in Suriname.



In the Dutch Army, Suriname. From right to left: Me, Carla Wolf, Yvonne Fernandes, Yaneke Van Ravenswaay, Mr. Brummer.

Me at my desk at the Nederlanse Handel Maatschappy, New York.





From left: Me, and my roommates: Hilda Gomperts, Elaine Emanuels, Telma Gomperts.



Engagement photo, 1951.



Our Wedding Day, March 11, 1952.

My speech after being awarded the Charles and Els Bendheim Distinguished Service Award from Manhattan Day School in March 2009.





In May 2000, the Dutch government bestowed the honor of knighthood upon Bram as it had upon his great-grandfather.



Lea Palache and me with all the children in peasant costumes in Monnekedam.



The young Palache family. From left to right: Yehudah, Lea, Avram, Mirjam and Leo.



Concert of the *Santo Servicio*, Amsterdam 2001. Seated next to me is Barry Mehler, the musical director of this event that was made into a Dutch documentary.



Me and "my babies"at Misgav Ladach Hospital, Jerusalem.



New *b'nai mitzvah* donning their tefillin purchased through the Abraham Lopes Cardozo Endowment Fund, Jaffa Institute, Bet Shemesh.

7

Special Friends

Bram and I had almost no family in New York. There was an enormous vacuum in our lives that was filled with friends who are as dear to us as family.



The Fernandes Family

When I arrived in New York, I connected with family friends from my hometown of Paramaribo. Many of them lived in the Hargrave Hotel on West 72nd Street along with other Dutch-speaking people who were post-war refugees. Although not related, the Fernandes clan who moved to New York had a very close connection to my parents. Phili Fernandes had provided my father with employment when he had lost his job and was in desperate need of income-producing work. He and his wife Bea were fun-loving people who

entertained a great deal, played cards and enjoyed life. They stood as my parents at our wedding. Phili's brother, Coen, and his wife, Lien, always provided me with warmth and good advice. Back in Suriname, Coen and Lien's kids—twins Harry and Lydia, Irvin and Edith, were good friends. I still remember as a very young child in Suriname going to their house across the street from the synagogue and having pillow fights while our parents were in the synagogue praying. I spent wonderful New Year's Eves with them in their house in Queens.

Julie and Annie Fernandes were Phili's sisters; they never married. Tante Annie was warm and down-to-earth. Tante Julie was very pure and child-like; always positive and happy. When she ate with Bram and I after were married, she was always eager to help, but when she left, it took me some time to clean up after her. She adored our girls, taught them card games and took them to movies and fun places. In many ways she was like a grandmother to them. After her sister Annie died, Julie moved to Scharf Manor, a kosher senior's residence in Queens. There, she acquired a lovely boyfriend, David, a widower who had been a dentist. They had a wonderful relationship. Even after David passed away, his children continued to give Julie a lot of love and respect.

The Stamblers

When Bram came to this country, he befriended Helen and Ben Stambler, both teachers and highly cultured people in the area of Jewish music in particular. They attended some of Bram's classes at the synagogue. When we got married, Ben was best man and their daughters were the flower girls. They went out of their way to help us. Having no family here, we especially appreciated their support. They lived in Brooklyn and often came to various synagogue functions and would stay half the night in our house talking

before heading home. They used to come with Robert and Beryl Scharfstein from KTAV Publishing Company. Bram was an early riser and often would excuse himself and leave me entertaining them until late in the night. Ben died at an early age and Helen remarried a Mr. Latner. Her advice column in the Jewish Week, "Ask Helen" was one of the newspaper's most popular features.

The Lynns

When Bram first came to this country he went to Yeshiva University to study. His first priority was learning English. His English professor, a most extraordinary and fine gentleman, Professor Irving Lynn, took an instant liking to the shy Bram. Chairman of the Department of English, Professor Lynn went on long walks with Bram in Washington Heights and a genuine friendship developed. Although Dr. Lynn was not religious, he had tremendous respect for Bram and the religious way of life.

When we got married, their daughter Peggy was one of our flower girls. The friendship was extended between wives. His lovely wife Clara was also an English professor. I will never forget their generous wedding gift to us: a full set of Farberware pots that I have to this day. When Debby was born, Clara and Irving drove us home from the hospital. They expertly guided us in changing our first diaper.

Over the years we ritually got together every winter, usually to attend a Gilbert and Sullivan production or some other musical. They showered our children with gifts—science records ("the sun is a mass/of incandescent gas") and other enrichment materials. They derived great pleasure in the blossoming of our daughters and in their academic and artistic successes.

If Bram and I extended our hand in friendship to new immigrants, it is because people like the Lynns modeled for us the kindness and love those who are established should show to newcomers.

The Hymans

Bram and Jean Hyman were close friends of ours. As a respected Trustee of the synagogue, Bram gave us a great deal of moral support. The first time we met his wife Jean she already had been stricken with MS and was bound to a wheelchair. She was a gracious Southern belle who had a dry sense of humor and a strong will to persevere despite her handicap. I visited her every Thursday. On New Year's eve, we would go to their home and spend the evening. Her husband Bram put on an apron and served everyone, including the nursing staff, bagels, lox and cream cheese. We often visited them in their country home in Deal, N.J. My Bram became particularly close to their son Billy when he taught him for bar-mitzvah. Billy grew up to become a successful businessman. His wedding in Montreal to his lovely wife, Sharon, was one of the last major events at which Bram officiated.

The Finks

Frances and Sam Fink were members of the synagogue who had no children; for them, the rabbis' children were like their own. Every year before the Holidays Frances would take Debbie and Judy out for lunch and then she would buy them each a new dress for Yom Tob. She did the same thing with Abbey Gerstein and Rose Guedalia. Sam drove the children to Chinatown and let them buy souvenirs. No birthday was forgotten. Many times, they came to our house for dinner on holidays and they reciprocated often with delicious Sunday night meals that for us were great treats. They lived

in the Schwab House on 73rd and Riverside Drive and had a beautiful view of the Hudson River. Before supper, we admired the sunset and then sat around and watched "College Bowl" and the Walt Disney show on the first color television we had ever seen. Frances had been a fashion illustrator and would draw pictures to amuse the girls. She also had a wonderful sense of humor and laughed a lot. I can still taste the delicious hamburgers and freshly steamed green beans. Good people and good friends.

The Friedmans

Another wonderful couple was Sam and Martha Friedman. Sam had a successful garment business and Martha was an extremely bright and dignified lady with a very proper bun and impeccable manners. When I was pregnant with Debbie, we lived in two rooms on 18 West 69th Street; there was barely room to turn around. I could hardly stand in that little kitchen. When Debbie was born, I could not get the baby carriage into the apartment. The Friedmans lived at 91 Central Park West and saw that we were struggling with limited space. They generously offered us the use of a storage room in the basement of their building to store some stuff as well as the carriage.

Every time we wanted to take Debbie out, we had to cross the street with all the paraphernalia to get the carriage. One of us had to carry the baby down, and when we came back home, we had to reverse the process to put things in order and bring the baby home. It was an exhausting two-person exercise but the use of the storage room helped us tremendously.

Martha was in many ways a mentor to me and we did many things together. She and I used to knit sweaters for the Red Cross. She

would go to the Red Cross office on Thursday and bring back the wool for a week's worth of work. One Thursday she went to the Red Cross office and came back very angry. Someone had made an anti-Semitic remark; Martha told her off and announced that she would never work for the organization again. Martha convinced me to go with her to Weight Watchers at the Fifth Avenue Synagogue; her sister Mrs. Goldfarb was a member. Every week everyone had to be weighed. We were always very amused when the rich ladies of the community removed all their jewelry before getting on the scale.

On Saturday afternoon while Bram and Sam Friedman went to the Talmud *shiur* and *minhah* services at the synagogue, the three of us would go to visit Martha. The girls would sit on the floor and read magazines while we would chat. Martha subscribed to many magazines, including Women's Wear Daily. The atmosphere was so pleasant and easy; Martha was an intelligent listener with a wonderful sense of humor. We would often stay till after Shabbat.

The Salomons and Bendheims

Certain friendships span one's lifetime and cross all boundaries and borders. This is the nature of my relationship with the Salomon and Bendheim families. We share a firm commitment to modern Orthodoxy, a love of the Sephardic *minhag* as well as the Dutch language and culture. Our children were educated in the same schools: Manhattan Day School and Yeshiva University High School (where Charlie served as Chairman of the Board). We share a great love of Eretz Yisrael. If not for Charlie and Els' gracious hospitality, we would never have been able to enjoy our many extended stays in Jerusalem.

We owe them so much. It was Ivan Salomon who convinced Shearith Israel to hire Bram. They hosted Bram and I for so many

Shabbatot and were the first to learn of and celebrate our engagement. Their daughter Els and husband Charles (Bendheim) became loving and dear friends. Our daughters became close with their daughters Aviva and Edna. To this day, I have a standing invitation to Aviva's every Friday evening when she is in the city. As luck would have it, the Salomons and Bendheims and now Aviva and her husband Marvin Sussman lived and live directly across the street, at 101 Central Park West.

Els' brother Robert and his wife Els Boniste, were also very close friends. Bram was their son Jack's *mohel* (the only *brit* Bram performed in the United States) and their daughter Carla was a bridesmaid at our wedding. Today, Carla, who works for UJA-Federation, serves as co-president of the Sisterhood with me. She and her husband Jonah are good friends.

Our families have been together through thick and thin. When the old Salomons were ailing, we would walk with Ivan and Bram would take his accordion over to their house and play Dutch melodies. Els Bendheim served me the *"seudat habra'ah"* after Bram's funeral. In her wisdom she convinced me not to go to the cemetery because it was not *"minhag Amsterdam."* To me, the Salomons and Bendheims are family and always will be.

Heidi Steinberg and the Stantons

Heidi and her son Ronald Steinberg came from Germany before the Second World War and became members of our synagogue. They became very good friends of the Nathan family as well as Captain Philips, who was very fond of Heidi. Heidi (pronounced Hedi) worked for many years at HIAS and had a prominent position there. She raised Ronald single-handedly and was the epitome of elegance and kindness. He went on to establish a privately-held

Fortune 500 company called Transammonia. Ronald (Stanton) has applied his business skills to the world of Jewish philanthropy with great success. He helped turn around Yeshiva University when it was in financial crisis and is mastermind behind its endowment fund. He has set a historical precedent by giving landmark gifts to Jewish education—blazing a trail that other major philanthropists are beginning to follow. He is a source of strength to our synagogue and has encouraged many others to follow in his generous footsteps.

Ronald and his wife Ruth brought up a wonderful son Oliver who was a beloved pupil of Bram. Oliver, his wife Liz and their beautiful children continue to maintain the close friendship. Ronald has two additional children—Heidi and Philip—named after his late parents. I served as one of Philip's godparents at the *brit.*

Peppy Lewin

The wife of a *hazzan* or a rabbi cannot easily have close friendships within her community. That is why I was especially grateful to make a wonderful friend from outside my immediate community. I met Peppy Lewin at a Manhattan Day School PTA meeting. She became like an older sister; we shared the Dutch language and had much in common. Peppy was the wife of Dr. Isaac Lewin, a scholar and statesman who was the Agudath Yisrael representative to the United Nations. Later on he was the Religious Studies Principal in the girls' Yeshiva University High School. She and her husband, along with their son Nat, escaped from Poland during the war. Peppy's parents lived in Amsterdam, Holland before the war, and that is where she got her excellent education. Her second son, Naftali, was known in Manhattan Day School as one of the brightest students they ever had. Nat became a world-famous jurist.

Peppy and I loved to go out for tea and speak Dutch. We were both very active in working for Re'uth and decided to set up a store with secondhand clothing to benefit the organization. We found an empty second floor space on West 72nd Street and named the store "Encore." At that time I had a friend who married one of the sons of the owners of Alexander Department Stores; we got quite a lot of merchandise from them. Friends gave us plenty of good second hand clothing and very soon our business was flourishing. Some people came in on a daily basis to check out the new merchandise. One day we got the scare of our lives. While people were streaming in through the open door, a robber entered along with them and demanded we open the cash register. He cleaned us out. Deeply shaken, we decided then and there to close shop.

Our granddaughter Zvia was born on July 27, 1980. She was our second grandchild and first granddaughter. Shortly after hearing the wonderful news about her birth I received a call from Mrs. Ochs, mother of Mrs. Eva Haberman. She informed me of Peppy's sudden death in Israel. It took a very long time to digest this information: it was a tremendous shock to me. I loved Peppy and never got to say a proper goodbye and "thank you" for all she did for me.

The Goldfarbs

Arnie Goldfarb was a young boy when I came to the synagogue. Bram taught him for bar mitzvah and they often joked together about his being a favorite student despite his lack of a musical ear. Arnie grew to become a prime mover in synagogue life. Active in the Young Men's Club with Joel Schneirson, Arnie established a Boy Scout Troop; his sister Pearl established and led Brownie's and Girl Scouts. An electronics wizard, Arnie was a key player at every event, as he was responsible for the mike and sound system. Arnie

loved the synagogue and he would never say no to any request on its behalf.

Arnie has always been a devoted and respected friend of the family. I will never forget how, when the girls were little and had winter vacation, he drove us all over town at night to see the beautiful lights. Although Bram liked to solve an assortment of technical problems in the house, he did so in his own special way. Whenever I became worried about one of Bram's "solutions" I could always call Arnie and he would come immediately. Arnie married Esther and together they brought up a wonderful family. Ardent Zionists, all their kids were members of Bnei Akiva and made *aliyah*.

There are countless stories about Arnie's selfless dedication to the synagogue and its members. He ultimately left his job as an electrical engineer and went to work for the synagogue full time. In that capacity, he served the community with his full heart and soul. Though there was a parting of ways, Arnie is still an important member of the synagogue family.

The Gubbays, Shahmouns and Sassoons

Among the most extraordinary and pious families were the Gubbays, Shahmouns and Sassoons. All of them were related to each other, originally from Iraq, afterward living in India, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

The Gubbays were most hospitable. They lived in a large Park Avenue apartment with their only child, Abraham, who they sent to Ramaz. Dinner at their home was a feast of Iraqi delights, one course more elaborate and delicious than the next. Katy had a wonderful sense of humor. Abraham, who was called Bram (like my husband), was the light of her eyes. As a young man, Bram Gubbay traveled to England, where he stayed with his relative,

the esteemed Rabbi Suleiman Sassoon in the Sassoon compound in Letchworth. Through Suleiman, Bram became very religious. He married Suleiman's daughter, Moselle, and eventually settled in Golder's Green, London.

Katy Gubbay was a Shahmoun. Her brother, Ezra, was a most unusual and brilliant individual who was a noted health food aficionado. Ezra was always bringing us nuts, dates and ginger, and teaching us about the healing powers of various foods and spices. He baked his own bread in a special stone oven and was known to stand on his head. When Ezra and Lydia were married fifty years, they hired a special cook to prepare a healthy Iraqi and Indian feast; it was a wonderful celebration. Ezra lived well into his nineties. Clearly, healthful eating did his body good!

Ezra and Lydia had three children: Sassoon (known as Dickie), who lives in Montreal with his wife Barbara; Diana and Rebecca. Dickie and Barbara have an apartment in New York and visit the synagogue whenever they are in town. We sometimes get together and reminisce about their extraordinary parents and old times.

The Abrahams

Joe and Liza Abraham arrived in New York in November 1951 from Shanghai with their little daughter Hannah. Liza arrived in the late stages of pregnancy. While living in a hotel on 86th Street and Central Park, she gave birth to a baby boy. The *brit* was planned, and Bram and I were invited; this was the first time we met them. Joe's uncle, Ezekiel, was supposed to hold the baby for the circumcision, however he got very nervous and backed out. They gave Bram the honor and he gladly accepted. All went well. The baby was named David; he had a lovely face with two dimples. From that day on we became very close to this family.

Our children grew up together and went to the same day schools. They too valued Jewish life and Jewish education. We spent many festivities and holidays together and joined in their annual Tu B'Shvat seder. When we stayed for a few weeks in Long Beach, Liza came with the children for a day to be with us. Bram took great pleasure in teaching David his first *haftarah* when he was a young boy.

When the children were still in day school, Liza's sister died in childbirth. With an older child to care for, her brother-in-law, the widower, was unable to cope. Liza and Joe immediately took Eddie in as their own child. He was the apple of everybody's eye. Several years later his father came and reclaimed him; we were all devastated.

Joe was a quiet and gentle person with very strong values. He was the synagogue's *ba'al tokea* and brought all his steadfast and pure qualities to this task. We were all shocked when he was diagnosed with brain cancer. After two years Joe passed away; everything possible was done for him.

His children and grandchildren follow in his footsteps; they are all very noble and fine people. We rejoiced in the *semachot* of the Abraham children, Hannah and Mitch and David and Hensche. David's youngest son Yosef, named after his grandfather Joe, was in the same bunk at camp with our grandson Yitzhak. They developed a close relationship and attended each other's bar mitzvahs.

The Habermans

Simon and Eva Haberman (nee Ochs) came to this country in the 1950s; they spent their first Pesach seder in our house. They have two lovely children, Suzy and Seth. Seth was a prize pupil of Bram and continues to this day to lead the junior congregation. Eva is a gifted early childhood educator and teacher trainer who taught at the Bank Street School of Education. When my grandson Yossi and

his wife Deena were looking for an apartment on the West Side, I approached Simon, who is in real estate. He offered them an apartment in the building where he and Eva live, as does Seth and his lovely family, which has worked out beautifully. They have extended their hand in friendship, inviting my grandchildren to their *succah* and making them feel a part of the family.

The Skydells

Norman Skydell was a frequent guest at our Shabbat table. He was the son of my friend Rivi, who I had worked with for Keren Yaldeinu. We were thrilled when the bright and witty Norman met his future wife Marilyn, and we stayed close to them as they raised their beautiful family.

It became a tradition for Bram and I in our later years to have Purim *Seudah* at the Skydells. First, Bram would read the *Megillah* for those gathered (in his usual record time) and then we sat down for a delicious feast. In memory of Bram, last year Norman studied the *Megillah* and read it wonderfully. It would have made Bram proud.

The Neustadters

Naomi Sutton was actually Debby's friend, having met through the American Sephardi Federation. Marrying Peter Neustadter, she brought another wonderful Ashkenazi into the Sephardic orbit. Naomi and Peter are a wonderful couple who have done much for Shearith Israel, both openly and quietly. Peter actually rose to become *parnas* of the synagogue, a remarkable feat for someone who did not grow up in the tradition. He is an extraordinary leader—calm, knowledgeable, fair and well-reasoned. Most recently, they renovated a beautiful Arab house in Jerusalem and divide their

time between their New York and Israeli homes. Judy and Sid are friendly with them, and it is wonderful that I have gotten to enjoy their delightful company both in NY and Yerushalayim.

The Freiliches

When they first came to the synagogue, Dennis and Estelle Freilich were a young couple with very young children. They lived on the East Side and walked, rain or shine, through the park to attend services. Within a short time, they became treasured members of the synagogue. After Jo Abraham died, Dennis became the *ba'al toke'ah*. He distinguished himself as one who truly embraced all the ways and traditions and eventually became the *parnas*—a great honor not often conferred on an Ashkenazi. Their four boys—three of whom are doctors and one a businessman—all studied with Bram for their bar mitzvah. Our Judy was their regular Saturday night babysitter for many years and delighted in their company. She credits them in preparing her for her future life as a mother of three active boys and for schooling her in ice hockey.

Both Dennis and Estelle are constantly in a process of traveling and learning new things. While Dennis is a Harvard-trained retinal surgeon whose three sons followed in his professional path, his passion is travel and history. Estelle all but completed her doctorate in Jewish studies and worked closely with Rabbi Rackman on the *agunah* issue. She bravely learned how to ski at age forty; she and Dennis spend winters in Colorado.

When my son-in-law Earl had a retinal detachment, Dennis and Estelle's son Jonathan saved his sight. Some time ago, I developed a strange problem in my left eye and called Jonathan. It was Chanukah. After lighting candles with his children, Jonathan came by car to pick me up and brought me to his office where he

examined me for over two hours. Consulting on the phone with several specialists, he mapped out a course of action. He drove me home and over the next two days oversaw all consultations. Thank G-d, the problem was minor. The care he took of me was incredible—more than one could expect from one's own child.

My great-grandson Nathan plays in the *shomer Shabbat* hockey league alongside the Freilich grandchildren. Jonathan's wife Stephanie provided my grandson's wife Deena with solid advice about their shared medical specialty. When we sat *shivah*, Estelle's daughters-in-law prepared the most wonderful meals for us. The Freilich family are dear and true friends.

The Kayes

When Judith and Stephen Kaye moved next door to 30 West 70th Street she met Bram on the street and asked him about the nearest kosher butcher. So began a friendship that extends until today. Bram went to put up her *mezuzot*, Debby became an occasional babysitter and with the years the connections deepened. The girls sometimes "house-sat" in the summer so they would benefit from the air conditioning! The Kayes joined the synagogue and their children attended the Polonies Talmud Torah. Their son Jonathan is well-versed in the *minhag* and often participates in the services of the Sephardic synagogue in Philadelphia. When Debby got into Barnard, Judith came by with a package: a beautiful peignoir set to wear during Freshman Orientation week. Louisa (now a successful lawyer) was a bridesmaid at Debby's wedding.

We followed their careers closely and were so proud to know such prominent members of the bar. We were most especially proud of Judith, who went on to become Chief Justice of the New York Court of Appeals, the highest court in NY. This was a post held

by late Justice Benjamin Nathan Cardozo, a very distant relative, who served as president of Shearith Israel. Judith is a great admirer of Justice Cardozo and delivered several lectures at the synagogue about him.

Judy and Sid forged their own special connection with the Kayes. Judith was upset that she could not attend their wedding because court was in session immediately after the New Year. Their wedding was on January 5. Wanting to be part of the festivities, she insisted on performing the civil ceremony in her home. On the designated day, Judy and Sid came to their home directly from work, dressed in their weekday clothes, prepared for some document signing, good conversation and a cup of tea. To their surprise, the Freiliches were in attendance and everyone, including Stephen who came home for the occasion, wore tuxedos. The ceremony was followed by cake and champagne.

Tragically, today Judith and I share something very powerful in common: we are both widows. Stephen passed away at much too young an age. He asked to be buried near his biological father, who had died suddenly when Stephen was a boy. Judith rode out to Spring Valley to see the grave, but realized that she would not even be able to be buried near Stephen. At this critical moment, I remembered how Bram and Stephen shared the honor of serving as *Hattan Torah* and *Hattan Bereshit*, respectively, a year and a half before Bram's death. I immediately offered to share our family plot, which had been given to us as a gift by George Blumenthal and family after they moved their parents' graves to Israel.

And so Stephen Kaye is buried next to my beloved Bram. It gives Judith and I a lot of comfort knowing that as they stood side by side holding the *sifrei Torah* in the synagogue, so they are resting in peace, side by side.

In the meanwhile, Judith, now retired from the court and back to the life of a busy legal practice in a large firm, visits me every Sunday. Often she brings flowers and a French bread that she knows I enjoy. I marvel at her energy and her incredible devotion to her family. She is a great lady and it is a privilege to know her.

The Friedmans

Joop and Renee Krant are good friends who live in Holland. Renee is a Cohen-Paraira and we knew her parents well. One year, we attended the bar mitzvah of their oldest son, Yigal, in Amsterdam. There we met a lovely couple, Helen and Jeffrey Friedman, New Yorkers who became close to the Krants through their business relationship. Bram and I immediately clicked with the Friedmans and our friendship continued after our return to New York. They are an extremely musical couple. Jeffrey goes to a different concert or opera every night, and has an incredible collection of recordings. Helen and I became fast friends and went on some wonderful shopping trips to Boro Park. Helen and I still speak weekly and she regularly showers me with treats. They recently became grandparents and we love sharing the joy of grandparenthood.

The Guenouns

Andre and Maggie Genoun, relatively new arrivals to the synagogue, became close to our family via Judy who was Maggie's Hebrew teacher. Both are CPAs and they have three lovely, brilliant daughters. Andre was our accountant and prepared our tax returns. When Bram's strength was beginning to fail, I saw that managing our finances was becoming burdensome for him. He had done this so scrupulously for so many years. I had a brainstorm to hire Andre to help us with bookkeeping and other matters that required clear

thinking, good judgment, organizational skills and the highest ethical standards. After Bram's death, Andre and Maggie have helped me navigate the new challenge of managing my finances. There is nothing I cannot discuss with them. Andre has consistently guided me with wisdom and good humor. He and Maggie are both unique and delightful people who have devoted a great deal of energy to their own parents; I am honored to be the recipient of their love and generous assistance.

Ruthie Weinfeld Raisner

When Judy started high school she invited a new friend to sleep over. That was our introduction to Ruthie, who became a *bat bayit* and a beloved adopted sister to our girls. Ruthie came from the Bronx, where she had attended Beth Jacob-Beth Miriam. Her mother had passed away when Ruthie was in grade school. Her oldest sister Tzippy was at Stern College and her next to oldest sister Miriam was in Debby's class.

Ruthie loved sleeping over for many reasons: we lived the closest to the school; she was a bright intellectual who fit right into our "salon"; she and Judy loved to sing; and her home in the Bronx was quite lonely. We had also acquired another unbeatable draw: Mrs. Liebreich, our regular Friday night guest, who had been Ruthie's English teacher in eighth grade!

Ruthie has been blessed with a wonderful husband and three wonderful children. She has also suffered unspeakable tragedies: Miriam's brutal murder at the tender age of 25 and Tzippy's tragic untimely passing. Her father too has passed on.

Ruthie, who works as a writer and editor for "Dorot" right here on the West Side, visits me religiously every week, bringing with her a gorgeous bouquet of flowers for Shabbat. We spend several hours

chatting and reminiscing. Ruthie is now not just Judy's friend but mine as well. And not just a friend—truly family. I love her dearly.

In-Laws

Since Bram and I had no family, we eagerly anticipated the girls' getting married and having in-laws who we might regard as such. We were very blessed on all counts.

Debby's first set of in-laws, Mel and Claire Blum, will remain among the best people Bram and I ever met. A beautiful couple in every way, they were hard-working family-oriented people with hearts of gold. Mel was head of UJA in Hudson County, NJ and Claire was head of Russian re-settlement. Their passion for those in need was incomparable. We had the privilege to travel to Israel together with them and had a wonderful time. It has been awkward maintaining contact since their son and Debby are no longer married. I would like to believe they know that our love for them never diminished. Mel called me when Bram passed away, and I was deeply touched. Claire passed away tragically, much before her time. I called Mel to offer my condolences and I know he appreciated it.

Joe and Gena Tenenbaum, Judy's in-laws, received Judy like royalty. Sid, their son and Judy's future husband, had already become our adopted son. Living on the West Side, his dark Polish looks made him look Sephardi, and with his musical ear he quickly learned all the synagogue melodies. This was a great source of comfort to us and we were thus thrilled that the Tenenbaums embraced Judy with such love and admiration. When Bram passed away, Joe flew from Toronto to the *shivah*. I will never forget his kindness.

We never had the privilege of meeting Earl's late father, Archie Smith. He was a towering figure who went to Harvard Law School, wrote many of the laws for the state of Rhode Island, and at the

time of his death, was advisor to the Supreme Court on ethics. Mrs. Miriam Smith—"Nana"—the mother of Earl, Debby's husband, was a most unbelievable lady who became an immediate and true friend. She and her late husband were pillars of the community in Providence, Rhode Island, where they were founders of the Providence Hebrew Day School. They were an unusual family that the late Bostoner Rebbe wittingly dubbed "FBF"—"Frum Before it was Fashionable." Nana was a brilliant woman whose simplicity and direct way of speaking made one feel instantly relaxed and comfortable. We visited her in Florida and had a delightful time. Bram would have gone back again—the problem was me, since my back did not get along very well with the mattress on Nana's guest bed.

Hashem works in unbelievable ways. The Tenenbaums bought a beautiful apartment in Nana's building in Bal Harbour, Florida. They became close, often sharing lively Shabbat dinners. Gena was eager to learn how to play bridge and insisted on paying Nana to teach her. Nana finally relented, donating all the money to *tzedakah*.

The Smiths continue to have great affection for the Tenenbaums. Meryl, Debby's sister-in-law, just finished reading the autobiography of Anda, Gena's sister, who she met at Nana's. It is fascinating to think that we served as a link between these families, who come from such very different worlds.

8

Around the Cardozo Table

Our home was always filled with people—notwithstanding financial limitations, a tiny kitchen and small dining room. On Shabbat, Pesach, Succot, breaking and taking a fast, our table was like the United Nations, graced with guests from all over the world. We built up a great circle of friends whom we cherished. Every Friday night our home glowed with a warm and happy mix of regulars and visitors. Somehow, like in the Temple of old, everyone managed to fit around our magically expanding table. We would sit for hours discussing Torah, issues of the day and singing zemirot. Our neighbors used to open their windows just to hear us sing.



Pesach

Pesach was a very busy time in our household. The cleaning started weeks before and the planning had to be done with great care, as the

apartment and kitchen were so small. Slowly, we began "eating up" all the *hametz* and space was freed up in the kitchen for the Pesach items. Eventually, we set up a bridge table in our bedroom with the remaining *hametz* items. We covered the dining room table with a white sheet. Then, with the help of the synagogue janitorial staff, who we tipped with both money and leftovers, we brought over all the boxes filled with our Pesach plates and pots from the basement of the synagogue, which blessedly was right next door.



All the furniture was removed from the living room and brought to Bram's office on the third floor of the community house. Then three long wooden tables were brought from the synagogue, which we set up in the shape of a "u."

The upheaval made for a true sense of "exodus." With the *seder* tables came a palpable sense of excitement. All the food (except for matzo balls, which I would buy from Papilsky Caterers in the Hotel Esplanade) was homemade and prepared in my kitchen. My Suriname *haroset* (see recipe in Chapter Two) was well-known even before it was published in the New York Times. Before *kasher l'Pesach* packaged foods existed, our Suriname friend and neighbor Mark Levie would purchase a fresh coconut from the health food store, crack it open and grate it for me. It seemed like all of New York came to the door with little containers to fill up with my *haroset.* Although Bram and the children helped, most of the work fell into my hands and so, for our *sedarim* I hired one person to serve and wash the dishes.

Into the backdrop of the sparkling clean and fragrant house, came a yearly guest: "Nana" Pergament, a regal lady with a bun. She had

come to us as a babysitter and the girls adored her. She worked for Harper and Row and would come laden with books for the girls. David Duque, Rose Meldola, the Obadia family, the Elias clan, the Shaws, the Waltuchs, Dr. and Mrs. Seltzer, a man who the kids called "Dr. Pinch" (Dr. Gold, a famous psychiatrist) and so many others joined us for *seder.* Suzie Aboodi and Victoria Aboodi and some other ladies came to us for lunch on the seventh day. Mrs. Stella Levy from Italy was often in our home. Every seventh evening of Pesach we had Professor Cecil Roth and his wife Irene for dinner with many Trustees and close friends. Cecil and Irene both were wonderful company and by evening's end, we had been regaled with stories and wonderful Italian *zemirot* melodies.



One Pesach during the middle days, the doorbell rang. The whole Shakie family, mother, father and all the children, were in New York looking for a place to eat. Dr. Avner Shakie was a member of Knesset who was very active in advocating for Sephardim in Israel. Somehow, a sumptuous meal emerged from the Cardozo kitchen. They ate with us for all the meals the rest of Pesach and we had a beautiful time. For the eight days of Pesach, the door was always open at the Cardozo home.



I no longer make my famous Suriname *haroset* but I taught many people how to make it. My granddaughter Chana Tziporah, a great cook and baker, makes it for me every year. She is named for my

late mother Tziporah and has definitely inherited her gift for the culinary arts.

Pesach reminds me of my mother. I think of the endless cooking and baking she did in preparation for the holiday. As children, it was one of the highlights of our year. I also remember how one week before Pesach in 1965, my mother died. All the guests had to be called. Unfortunately, Amy Gerstein, who always hosted guests for the first evening *seder*, lost her mother at the same time. Many people had to look for other accommodations for the *sedarim*. With people coming and going, and a busy telephone, the *shivah* was a madhouse. It was a good thing that most of my preparations were finished before I received the sad news. I could see the hand of G-d at work.

That year, the *sedarim* were just the four of us with Mrs. Liebreich, a regular Friday night guest. It was so strange to have *sedarim* without a house filled with people. Still, they were particularly memorable because there was no pressure and we had time to savor and enjoy each other's company and insights.

There were two years when the philanthropists Erna and Jacob Michael invited Bram to conduct the second night *seder* for them, their family and invited guests. Their beautiful apartment on Central Park West and 80th Street was bustling with uniform-clad helpers. The table was set in a royal fashion with shining silver and crystal. Jacob Michael loved the Sephardic melodies and insisted Bram conduct the *seder* in the Spanish and Portuguese tradition. In fact, the recordings that Jacob Michael commissioned Bram to make were gifted as part of his estate to Hebrew University in Jerusalem. They re-mastered some of these recordings and re-published them under the guidance of Dr. Edwin Seroussi, Chairman of the Musicology Department at the Hebrew University, when Bram was ninety. I helped him get funding from the Safra Foundation for

the publication of a book along with CDs entitled, "The Western Sephardi Liturgical Tradition as Sung by Abraham Lopes Cardozo."

The High Holidays

The High Holiday season began with a month of *selihot* in Elul. The beloved melodies of the Days of Awe were in the air; Bram hummed and sung all the time in joyous anticipation of the holidays. For a *hazzan*, this season is a stressful one, spiritually and physically. Bram was anxious about his voice in this transitional time between the summer and the fall, and I was busy scheduling all our guests, shopping and cooking.

There were years when, in addition to doing services and reading from the Torah, Bram blew shofar. Later, Joe Abraham took over and carried out this *mitzvah* with his characteristic aristocracy and calmness. When Joe became ill, Bram asked Leo Palache, the *ba'al tokea* in Amsterdam, to make him a tape with the precise rendition of the Spanish and Portuguese style of shofar blowing. This tape help reinstate the authentic tradition in the New York synagogue. It went on to guide the future *ba'alei tekia*—Dennis Freilich and his son Elliot.



At this time of year, people generally like to pray in their own *nusah* and are eager to go back home to the traditions of their youth. Many people converged upon us for the High Holidays. My brother Ewald and his family came on occasion and enjoyed the services as he had known them in his childhood.

The de la Fuentes, a Dutch family introduced to us by the Dutch Chief Rabbi Haham Pereira, came from Boston every year for Rosh HaShanah and Kippur. Alex knew the service well and helped with the *hazzanut* in the "overflow" service that was held in the auditorium downstairs in the synagogue. He and his wife Rosa and children Jenny and Maurice ate many meals with us over the course of the holiday. Els Salomon hosted them for Rosh Hashanah lunch every year.

Bram's teacher, the Dutch Chief Rabbi Haham David Pereira, had a son and daughter living in the New York area. Frieda married an Ashkenazi and did not join us for holidays, but we maintained an extremely close relationship. Her brother Tinus lived in Syosset, NY with his wife Thea and family, and looked forward every year during the High Holidays, to stay in the area and help lead the "overflow" services downstairs in the synagogue. Resembling his late father in both stature and voice, Tinus conducted the services in an authentic Dutch Spanish and Portuguese manner.



The Bondi Family

Edith and Arnold Bondi, together with their children Ardith and Eugene, would come to NYC from Berkeley, California for the High Holidays. Edith (Friedlaender) Bondi and her brother Helmut were young members of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue and belonged to its "Young People's Group." The Friedlaenders were very wealthy and cultured refugees from Berlin/Laussane who lived on Central Park West. Helmut was a lawyer and banker who became an important book collector. Edith married a brilliant German-born scientist named Arnold Bondi. They moved to Berkeley where

he worked for Shell Oil and was involved in the development of the "No-Pest Strip." They later moved to Houston, Texas.

Edith's birthday coincided with Bram's; both were during the High Holidays. We celebrated together over lunch. The conversation was always lively and Arnold recited the Grace After Meals in his unique Germanic Spanish & Portuguese style. Edith always had very visionary ideas. In California, she started a Jewish camp called TIMNA —"Torah In the Midst of Nature" and later became a major patron of Camp Morasha with Zvi Reich as director.

When they moved from Berkeley to Houston, Edith became interested in helping underprivileged children. She devoted a lot of time to literacy and received a doctorate in the field. No matter what the occasion, she always wore a pin which said "Kids are Special People." She was also instrumental in bringing Sephardic rabbis to the local synagogue there. She invited us to come for a weekend where Bram delivered a lecture and officiated. It was one of the hottest and rainiest weekends in Houston.

Ardith and Eugene Bondi were both exceptionally wonderful and gifted children. Ardith became a biochemist and is a concert-level flutist. Eugene became the associate principal cellist with the Honolulu Symphony after having studied with world-renowned cellists Janos Starker and Gregor Piatigorsky. Eugene married a lovely girl, Rebecca. Within the first or second year of their marriage, it was discovered that he had advanced melanoma. He died after a valiant fight. Edith donated his cello (which had been custom-made for him) to a musician in need. Multi-talented Ardith has made many changes in her life. She now is a bird photographer.

After Arnold died, Edith took me with her on a trip for two to Denmark that she had won in a raffle. Everyone was sure we would return home great enemies because Edith and I both are known as strong personalities. Nothing like that happened. I decided ahead of

time to "go with the flow" and be agreeable to everything. The order of the day was to get up at six o'clock, have breakfast—an egg, a pot of yogurt, some fruit, and tea. For Edith, six o'clock in the evening was bedtime: we went to our rooms, showered and went to sleep. I would have liked to stay with the lovely people in the group and have some fun downstairs, but she went up and I followed; those were the rules and regulations! The trip was most interesting and the best part was bringing my grandson Yossi Legos straight from LegoLand.

An Unexpected Blessing

It is a universal tradition to bless one's children before Kippur, the Day of Atonement. After the service one Kol Nidre night Mr. Israel Viera, a Dutch survivor of the Holocaust who knew Bram's parents, called me over and asked if he could see Bram for few minutes. It was an unusual request on the holiest of all nights.

Mr. Viera asked Bram if he could bless him. Obviously, he felt himself a link to Bram's late parents. Bram bowed his head and received the blessing. We were all immensely moved.

Succot

Jean and Pete Mateles were members of the synagogue who, in the first year of our marriage, surprised us by building a *succah* on the porch in our 69th Street apartment. We entertained many people in that *succah*.

Later, when we moved to a larger apartment, Ivan Salomon gave us a small collapsible Spero *succah* as a gift. We put it up in the courtyard behind our apartment building. We transported the food via a pulley attached to a laundry basket from our first floor window.

On long tables borrowed from the synagogue, we hosted many people including groups of children from Manhattan Day School who marveled at seeing a private *succah* that was a rarity then. One year, the landlord felt that it was dangerous and a liability to him and so that wonderful era ended. From then on, we hosted people at the beautiful *succah* next door in the synagogue.

The decoration of the synagogue *succah* and serving the daily breakfast was the responsibility of the Sisterhood. Under the leadership of Rose Harte, many ladies came and spent hours stringing cranberries and working to beautify the pine-scented *succah*. For all the middle days of the holiday, over the course of forty years, a small group of women and I set up and helped serve early breakfast for the people who came to the morning minyan. I did this for forty-three years.

Shabbat

The weekly Shabbat table was filled with a wide variety of people—some regulars and some special visitors.

Mr. Fishblatt

From the first Shabbat after our marriage, we hosted guests in our home. Mr. Fishblatt, Bram's landlord in his bachelor days, spent many Friday nights with us. An elderly man and a confirmed bachelor, he was quite eccentric but very enjoyable company. The minute Bram left for services, Mr. Fishblatt would take out his wallet and start counting his money. He was surprised when I explained to him that this was not permitted on Shabbat. He had little Jewish education and attended the Reform synagogue Rodeph Shalom, which he pronounced "Rudolph" Shalom. When it came time for Grace After Meals, he said: "Bram, let's belch!" When Debby was born, he delighted in playing with her while I readied the Shabbat table.

Molly Leibreich

Molly Leibreich was recently widowed when we met her in the synagogue. Her husband was a brilliant Reform rabbi who had amassed books rather than money in preparation for their old age. He bequeathed his library to a university, leaving Molly no choice but to return to teaching in order to supplement his small pension. Without complaint, she traveled on the subway to Beth Jacob-Beth Miriam in the Bronx where she shared her exceptional intelligence and wit with her students. She was a mentor to one of her prize students, someone who was later to be a close friend of Judy's and like a daughter to me, Ruthie Weinfeld.

Molly was a strong character. When she was upset about something, she would come in with her arms folded tightly on her chest and say, "I'm not in the mood." She would then proceed to report on the things that bothered her during the week that could range from bad grammar to a bad sermon. She was good company and our girls loved her. Every Saturday night she would come over and do the crossword puzzle with one of them; on Sunday morning she would do the double acrostic with Maurice Ben Ruby, an Egyptian Jew from the synagogue. She tutored Judy in math and helped her pass the trigonometry Regents exam.

When Molly passed away, her son insisted that she be buried near his home in King of Prussia, PA. Though understandable, it was sad because she had made so many friends in New York after her husband's death; very few of her friends from the neighborhood and from the synagogue could attend the funeral.

Young People

Bram and I enjoyed the company of the younger generation. We were fortunate that they enjoyed our company as well. The Friday

nights with Herman Salomon, David Ben-Naim, his cousin, Carlos Ben-Naim, and Bram's prized student Daniel Halfon, were filled with laughter and song. Daniel provided endless entertainment in the form of brilliant imitations. Herman always had interesting people staying with him. He befriended the *shamash* from a synagogue in Portugal, Mr. Jose Toati, and brought him to New York. Jose was a simple person who was trying to make a life for himself in the big city. We got him a job in the packing department of Wakman Watches, owned by the Karasick family. Jose, in his interesting amalgam of English and Portuguese, had hysterical stories to tell. His mispronunciations were always very revealing and funny: he consistently called Washington "Hashishton." David Ben-Naim always had interesting *divrei Torah* and melodies to contribute to the table and we felt like he was a son in our house.

Ariel Toaff

At the request of Mr. Ivan Solomon, we opened our home to a Yeshiva University student from Rome, Italy. Ariel Toaff was the son of Rabbi Eliyahu Toaff, Chief Rabbi of the Sephardic Community of Rome. Ariel was a very jolly and interesting visitor. He happily slept on the couch in the living room and we were always ready with his favorite dessert from Tasty Pastry—Hawaiian Pie. On Friday night and many other occasions, Herman Salomon would join us after the meal. He used to get into discussions with Ariel, who was learned and open to new ideas. Ariel was very handsome and charmed everyone, including many girls. Ariel's glamorous Italian girlfriend, with her father in tow, came to pay him a timely visit. After a year in New York he returned to Italy and went on to be a well-known and unsurprisingly controversial Jewish historian at Tel Aviv University.

Edie Styler

The minute Edie Styler, a student at Stern College, walked into our house, we fell in love with her because of the warmth of her smile and her dimples. She became a babysitter and an adopted daughter for weekends and we always enjoyed her company. She would tell the girls funny stories about her inner-city student teaching job. The Bendheims also fell in love with her and a close tie was created with all of us. She met her husband "Yudie" Gellman in Yeshiva University and we all attended her wedding in her hometown of Hartford, Connecticut. Her husband became a professor of philosophy at several universities in Israel and we continued to be close after their move to Israel. Small world: Dr. Gellman lectures occasionally at the David Cardozo Institute in Israel.

Shmuel Avital

One day there was a knock on the door. I opened it and saw a very young Moroccan Jew standing there. Someone told him to come and see me because he had a big problem. He had fought in the Suez Campaign in Israel in 1956 and in doing so he lost the hearing in both his ears. He pleaded with me to please help him. He came from a very poor family and had no way to pay for the medical help he needed. I picked up the phone and called my ENT friend Dr. Schiffman whose office was across the street at 101 Central Park West. I told him the story and he told us to come over right away. He examined Shmuel and generously offered his services pro bono but we had to get the money together for the hospitalizations. In no time I collected the funds. Six months after the operation on one ear was deemed a success, the other ear was operated on. The whole ordeal lasted a year, and with G-d's help this young man got his hearing—and his life—back.

Despite his physical discomfort, he was always very sweet and friendly. Debby and Judy were fascinated by him. He was a mime and a student of Marcel Marceau. On Purim, after the *Megillah*, he performed a brilliant mime of the entire story. I remember how he stood on his tiptoes, as he imitated Haman being hung. We remained friends and whenever he was in New York, he never failed to come by and also to visit Dr. Schiffman. His parents who resided in Tel Aviv gave me a *kameya* (Kabbalistic amulet) in a sealed tube to bless our family for having helped their son. I treasure their gift. He went on to establish a school for mime, Le Centre du Silence, in Boulder, Colorado.

Judy Leva Hoff

I believe it was the night of the first Haggadah, 1972. The *seder* table was set and all preparations in order. Debby and Judy went next door to the synagogue to listen to the *hallel.* After services were over, they looked forward to accompanying our guests home. To their surprise, a beautiful young woman with gorgeous skin and a smile that could power the world, approached them: "Excuse me, can you tell me where the community *seder* is?" The girls looked at her, incredulous. "Where are you from?" they asked, detecting a mid-west accent. "Kansas City," she answered. "There is no community *seder* here," they told her. She looked bewildered and crestfallen. "But of course you are invited to our house!" the girls added. And so it is that we met the incomparable, indomitable Judy Leva.

Judy lived right around the corner, on West 69th Street. She had come to NY from Kansas City to study theatre. The love between us was mutual and in no time she was an adopted member of the family. Judy was thirsty to learn more about Orthodoxy and soon met a friend who took her to hear Rav Avigdor Miller. Judy delighted us with her many stories of "Kansas City girl on the road to becoming a *frum* New York Jew." Two that we vividly remember: Rav Miller

kept on referring to the *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* (reference to G-d), while Judy kept on trying to figure out what/who that referred to. Finally she blurted out: "And just who is this *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*?" eliciting gales of warm laughter. Later, when she became engaged, she attended a class for brides. The teacher talked about times of *"negiah"* (touching) and *"lo negiah"* (no touching), referring to different times when couples can be intimate. Judy raised her hand: "Is that 'low *negiah*' as opposed to 'high *negiah*?" Her laughter was infectious and she would have us in stitches.

Judy's first date with her future husband, David Hoff, was from our house. Judy remembers vividly that we said, as we buzzed him in, "You are going to marry him!" Today, *Baruch Hashem*, they have six wonderful children and many grandchildren. Judy recently underwent a liver transplant, with the donor being one of her special children. We are so happy to be in close contact with this extraordinary family.

Marc Passy and The Ziskind Girls

There was a woman's clothing boutique on 72nd Street called "Off Broadway." It still exists as a high-end resale store. When it opened, other fashionable stores opened in the neighborhood, notably Charivari. It was part of the retail blossoming of the neighborhood. One day I stepped in there and met a lovely young salesgirl named Judy who confided in me about her current boyfriend Norris Wolff. I invited them over for Shabbat and discovered that he had Turkish family who were Sephardim. Norris was very proud of his heritage. He loved Ladino music and flamenco dance and developed a strong bond with our synagogue and with many members such as the Francos and the Beispiels. They married at the synagogue in a gala celebration. I will never forget the huge pink tent that was erected inside one of the reception rooms. The room was magically

transformed. The Wolffs and Judy's twin sister Joyce continue to be active in the synagogue League.

Through them, we met Mark Passy, a tall, dark and handsome Israeli-born advertising executive. He was divorced with a son and was eager to expand his social circle. Mark's parents were dignified Greek Jews who became our friends. We visited with them often in Tel Aviv. His father worked for Recanati Shipping. Mark, too, was in many ways like a son to us, and a regular at our Shabbat table.

Rahel and Mimi Bloch

Rahel and her daughter Mimi lived on 72nd Street. It was a treat when this remarkable mother and daughter graced our table. Rahel was a Jewish educator and Mimi, a quiet and brilliant student. She went on to marry Henry Feuerstein and together they serve as pillars of the Boston Jewish community. Mimi is a most devoted daughter and something of a legend in Boston and the Jewish world for her incredible *hessed* and *hachnasat orchim.*

Aunt Rosie and Uncle David

David Duque lived in Hamburg for some time and then moved with his parents, Rabbi and Mrs. Baruch Duque, to Curacao. After they moved to New York and his father passed away, he lived alone with his mother in a hotel on Broadway. When his mother died he came to us for meals after attending services in the Synagogue. He was very lonely and sad during that time because he was very attached to his mother. Sometime after his mother's death he was re-introduced to Dr. Rosemarie Meldola, who was an old friend from Hamburg. The friendship blossomed and they decided to get married. She had married briefly during the war and it took some doing to obtain a *get.*

Rose came from an illustrious family in Hamburg. Her father was a physician, and all his daughters became doctors. Rose was in the middle of completing her certification exams when the Anschluss came. She said the oral exams were a sham; every question dealt with her being a Jew. She went through a harrowing time in concentration camp, ministering to as many people as she could. When she came to New York after the war she had to go through medical school again. Because of the crowded condition in the camps, she suffered from claustrophobia and hated having to attend crowded lectures.

Rose had a heart of gold and was an excellent clinician. She helped many people in her practice whose office was located near the Lower East Side. "Aunt Rosie" became our children's pediatrician. She never wanted to accept a fee for her services, and I shall never forget her kindness to our children, especially Debbie who had trouble with allergies. Many Sundays, we had brunch in their home and they hosted us at Lou G. Siegel's Restaurant. They spent Pesach, Rosh Hashanah and other holidays around our table, and they were always invited to Robert and Els Salomon's house along with us.

Rose adored David: nothing was too much to do for him. David was crazy about Rose. When she made house calls, no matter what the hour, he would accompany her carrying her black bag. They were each strong personalities and each was stubborn about what they wanted—David insisted on smoking his cigars and Rose was forever after him to watch his weight. When they reached retirement age, Rose decided that she wanted them to spend the remaining days of their lives in a quieter atmosphere, in the country. They purchased a condominium in Lakewood. David loved the hustle and bustle of Wall Street and the financial markets. He was very unhappy about retiring, but he reluctantly did what Rose wanted.

David had a massive heart attack at the poolside very shortly after their move to Lakewood. He was buried in our cemetery in a spot that was filled with stone and glass. Rose complained about this to those in charge but was rebuffed. She grew more and more furious every time she visited David's grave. She further felt that her own burial plot, next to David's, was a little strip-- not befitting all the money she had paid. We tried to advocate on her behalf but were unable to help her fix the problem. In frustration, Rose decided to move David's grave, stone and all, to Lakewood. She called in a Conservative Rabbi to assist her and left us out completely. Our Debbie who was visiting Lakewood went to see Rose in the hospital the summer before she died. When she passed away, the family did not call us to officiate. It was a great loss to us and I am sad about the way this wonderful friendship ended. I still remember her with love and gratitude.

Uncle David and Tante Nettie Jessurun Cardozo

In 1936 David Jessurun Cardozo (not a direct relative) was brought to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue from the Gateshead Yeshiva in England. He did not last a long time in this position. In 1943 he became minister and *hazzan* of the sister synagogue, Congregation Mikveh Israel, in Philadelphia. He was highly intelligent and personable, but soon got in trouble for his naiveté and outspokenness. David never married and lived alone. He sent for his sister Nettie, who during the war, had been hidden in a home in the famous cheese-producing town of Alkmaar, Holland. Posing as a peasant girl/household helper she spent her time mending, washing and ironing the uniforms for German soldiers who had taken up residence in the house. She lived in constant fear that the German soldiers would find out that she was Jewish. When the war was over, she came to New York. She was so weak when she arrived

that David sent her to stay at a Jewish camp in the countryside—Ramah—to regain her strength.

For many years, Nettie handled David's household in a very capable and sweet way. After some time, David took a job with the Sephardim in the Bronx. There he battled with the Oriental Sephardic community, especially David Perahia—the father of the famous pianist Murray Perahia. David Cardozo, like so many Portuguese Jews before him, was perceived as thinking himself superior to the Oriental Sephardim. The Sephardim of the Bronx often spoke Ladino, which he did not understand; this frustrated him greatly. One Shabbat morning he came to the Synagogue and to make a point, started to deliver the sermon in Dutch. Nobody took this with a sense of humor. Needless to say, he was fired immediately.

In the meantime, Nettie got a good position at the United Nations, and decided to move from the Bronx to a small apartment in the Hargrave Hotel on 72nd Street, to be close to us. After the Bronx fiasco, David got a job in Riveredge and lived alone.

Nettie was a good friend and a very fine person. My children were the apples of her eye. They in turn loved it when Tante Nettie sang Dutch children's songs to them. I accompanied her whenever she went shopping on 72nd Street at the dress store Malva or at Tip Top Shoes, and these evenings were always very pleasant. She would come from her job at the United Nations bearing all kinds of Dutch treats–*hagelslag* (chocolate sprinkles) and *zoute drop* (black licorice.) The children always looked forward to her visits. She knew the *minhag* of Amsterdam and enjoyed reminiscing with Bram about old times. She remembered him from those years and from "Hagomel," a youth organization at the *esnoga* in Amsterdam where the midday Shabbat meetings featured the Torah reading and *minhah*. Bram was a leader of Hagomel who composed many melodies for those services which she remembered (as did Bella Montezinos at whose

wedding Bram, his father and brothers played the music). All the holidays were spent with us, until she met Manuel, a co-worker at the U.N. from Lisbon. We all discouraged her from entering into such a relationship, but she went on to take an apartment with him in Queens. Ironically, he had a Sephardic name, Manuel Quiros. Her brother David could not stand him and was furious with her.

Over the years, David had saved a few dollars. A friend advised him to invest in a real estate deal in Chicago. These people also put in a big amount. It was a scam and poor David lost his life savings. He cried easily and could not stop. There was nothing we could do to help him. Whenever he was in the neighborhood, he would call us and say, *"Ik ben in de buurt"*—"I am in the neighborhood," meaning I am coming to eat. We felt sorry for him, but we could only console him and give him courage. Whenever he was on a trip, he sent the girls postcards.

After a while we all got used to Nettie and her boyfriend. David took speaking engagements, sometimes on weekends. Once, when he was speaking at a university, on his way back to his room, he had a massive stroke. Nettie's boyfriend was never allowed to use David's car, but we were all so worried and upset that the next morning the four of us piled into David's car to see him in the hospital. It was very sad: David could only understand Dutch. We were going to Holland and had to say good-bye to him. We left with a heavy heart and contacted Nettie often. We came back at the end of August. One day after we came home David passed away. He waited for us so Bram could officiate.

Now the real trouble started: David had no will and Nettie alone faced the overwhelming task of cleaning his apartment, which was filled with many books. She would have wanted us to take the entire library, but given our crowded apartment, what could we do with so many books and papers? On a Sunday morning I went to David's

apartment in Forest Hills, Queens. Nettie insisted that we pick a few books. In the afternoon, two gentlemen came and filled bags with books and each handed Nettie $100; the books they took were worth much more. Later came a couple we all knew well, friends of David. They took and took, even Dutch books (they were not Dutch), and carried many bags away. They promised to send Nettie a check in a few days; after six months nothing came. I urged Nettie to call and remind them. Their answer was, "We don't know what you are talking about; we don't owe you anything." To steal from a woman who needed the money is a great sin. After a time, the landlord wanted to rent the apartment and still many books remained. The publisher Feldheim came with a truck and Nettie sold him everything for a few dollars.

Nettie knew the *minhag* of Amsterdam very well and kept a strictly kosher home until her boyfriend messed everything up. She no longer spent the holidays with us. He became her boss and she became like a helpless child. One day Nettie called and asked what a funeral would cost. I got the information for her and she discussed it with him. He screamed and shouted, and told Nettie she should have nothing to do with us. She had no choice. The next thing we knew they had left for Florida. We were very sad: we loved Nettie.

I wrote her several times without receiving an answer. A good friend of ours in Florida who knew Nettie from Holland regularly informed us about how she was doing. He always assured us that Manuel was taking excellent care of her. We did not know when she became critically ill. Manuel brought her back to New York and she secretly wrote me a letter asking me to call her. We were away for a few days and I received the letter too late. By then, she was in critical condition. I got in touch with the hospital. The doctors told Manuel that there was nothing that could be done for her any more. When he heard this he went crazy and tried to kill himself. They took him to a hospital for mentally ill people. With

Manuel out of the picture, the doctors contacted me to tell me that Nettie passed away. I immediately called Arnie Goldfarb, who was on the *Hebrah*, and begged him to help. I knew that a plot was reserved for her next to her brother. Arnie was a tremendous help. At the funeral, only Bram, Arnie and I stood around the grave. The Riverside Chapel helped a great deal with the finances. For the stone I collected $2,000—from Dutch friends—and I saw to it that she was taken care of in a very decent way, with a plain flat stone and a plain inscription. Nothing went easily, I had objections from certain people, but I did not let go and prevailed in doing what was right.

In the meantime, her boyfriend's family came from Lisbon and ransacked their apartment. They even took the envelope she left for me to pay the funeral arrangements. All her remaining possessions were put in storage and after a while were sold.

Capsouto Family

One day I walked into the lobby of our Synagogue office and saw a lovely grey-haired lady sitting on the couch knitting a sweater for one of her sons. I introduced myself to her and showed interest in her knitting. Her name was Eva Capsouto and her son, Albert, was going to our Hebrew School. She was a young mother of three boys who came to the USA via Lyons and was now living in Washington Heights. Her husband Marco was in poor health but he had found a job as a runner for a big security house where he was very respected. Apparently he had worked for the Zionist movement in Egypt and had to pay very dearly for it in an Egyptian prison. Eva and I clicked immediately and became very good friends. They needed some assistance so I offered her some help and she gladly accepted. The oldest son Jack went to work while the two younger ones, Samuel and Albert, went to school. Eva took some small jobs babysitting and knitting for people. Twice a week while she was waiting for her

son to finish Hebrew School, I sat with her and we worked on our knitting; she taught me a great deal. At that time I loved to knit and crochet, and under her guidance I made several sweaters for Debbie and Judy. I also crocheted many blankets, which we still have on our beds today.

Eva considered me a sister and she poured her heart out to me during our time together. It wasn't easy to be in a strange land with different customs and a new language. Her husband was working for Salomon Brothers, but he eventually could not keep his job because of his poor health. He had a bad case of diabetes and other illnesses. Very shortly after his resignation he passed away. It was very hard for Eva to ask for help, but she had three growing boys and little funds with which to care for them. Salomon Brothers did what they could to help with Sammy's education. He was studying for a degree in French Literature. Also the Politis, who were very active in the Sephardic Jewish community, did a great deal to help the family. Jack went to work for Citroen and hurt himself in a fall; he had to be hospitalized. This was a great setback for the family. My husband was very instrumental in the youngest son Albert's bar mitzvah preparations. Eva made a small party in her home and Bram and I bought him a *tallit.*

When our first grandchild Yossef (Yossi) was born, Debbie needed someone to babysit when she went back to work. We immediately asked Eva. It was a love affair all around; she adored Yossi and we all adored her. My friendship with Eva made enjoying our new role as grandparents all the more wonderful. Yossi often stayed with us, which was a great treat for Judy and me; we sang to him and cuddled with him. After a while Debbie and family moved to New Jersey and Eva left. I read in a bulletin of the West Side Institutional Synagogue that the Ehrman family was looking for a nanny for their daughter, Alissa. I called Susan Ehrman and recommended

Eva highly. Eva was hired and a great friendship developed between the Ehrman family and Eva.

Albert was an academic star and was studying to become an architect at Yale University and Jack was working at many famous restaurants. Eva called me one day to tell me that the boys were planning to open a restaurant called "Capsouto Freres," the Brothers Capsouto, in SoHo, an area in downtown New York that was not yet developed. This proved to be a brilliant move; within a number of years, the area became one of the most "happening" places in the city. She was very proud of her boys and their accomplishments. She asked us to come bless the restaurant by putting a *mezuzah* on the front entrance. She explained to us that even though the restaurant was not kosher, it would mean a lot to her.

Eva, the restaurant's "matriarch" greeted all the guests and watched over the personnel, cooks and waiters. Everyone who walked into the restaurant befriended her. Every year on Passover, the Capsouto family made *seder* evenings in the restaurant and people paid to attend. A Reform cantor performed and Eva prepared the food in silver foil (fish, potatoes, asparagus and many Sephardic dishes) to adhere to the Passover dietary laws. The money they earned went to the JDC which had assisted them in Egypt as well as other worthwhile organizations in Israel, including my beloved Jaffa Institute.

In the late 1990s, Eva went to the doctor who told her that her cancer had returned. The boys decided to keep her home, close to them. They sought out the best possible care for her. Jack had known a lovely woman who was now retired and had moved to a convent. He called and asked her to come be his mother's nurse. She had to get special permission from the Mother Superior, which she got, and she came to take care of Eva until the very end.

Two months later, on the first evening of Pesach, Eva passed away. The boys carried on with the *sedarim* and did not tell anyone. I have

a great respect for what they did. They honored her by persevering as she did on their behalf, despite the obstacles.

On that fateful day of September 11, 2001, the Capsouto Freres threw open the doors of their restaurant to one and all, those fleeing the Twin Towers and those in the relief services, and provided them with shelter, free food and drink.

As I pen these words, I am still reeling from the shock of Albert's passing from an inoperable brain tumor diagnosed less than a nine weeks ago. He was in his forties—such a young man!—and I remember his bar mitzvah like it was yesterday. I am in awe of the incredible devotion of his brothers, who were with him day and night. The love between the Capsouto frères is truly extraordinary—a model for others to study and follow.

Franja and Lou Binder

Many years ago, a young couple with two little children joined our Synagogue. They lived on the Lower East Side and every Shabbat walked to our Synagogue on 70th Street; eventually they moved to a small apartment on 72nd Street. This family, Franja and Lou Binder, participated in our many activities and were very Orthodox. At one point they befriended us and many times came to us to discuss Jewish subjects. Lou was a born Jew and she was a convert. Though it was a financial strain, their children attended Manhattan Day School. Franja was the daughter of Professor Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago, who was a world-renowned academic. One day she called and asked to come and see me. She had fallen sick and the doctor had found that she had pancreatic and liver cancer. She was devastated. All of her friends came to assist her and help out with the finances.

After she died, I invited her husband and the kids on Friday nights. One Friday evening he became unbearably sick with a terrible pain in his body. To everyone's horror, he contracted the exact same illness as his late wife. This was an extremely rare and strange occurrence of husband and wife contracting the same cancer; Lou always suspected there was some malfunctioning x-ray equipment somewhere in the building. There was an investigation but nothing was discovered. The illness was unstoppable and he passed away a short time later. Lou's family came to get the children. I am sure that they are very well taken care of, although we do not hear from them. To come back to see their friends and family is probably too hard for them and filled with too many bad memories. Wherever they are, I hope that they have inherited the special qualities of gentility and faith that characterized their late parents.

Tastes of Holland

Our home was frequented by many Dutch people who one way or another found their way to our door.

An adorable young Dutch couple, Polly and Piet Cohen, moved to NY. He was an industrial designer and she was an avant-garde milliner. We immediately took to them, and we became like family. We knew her father Dr. Herzberger from Amsterdam. They came over often and we had lots of fun. We introduced them to many friends. Piet designed an octagonal *succah* for the Freilich family that they used for many years. He also designed our girl's room (in purple, red and mustard), commissioning custom wooden beds and desks to fit in the tiny space. The night after Polly gave birth to their beautiful baby Asnat, Piet slept on our couch that he fondly called *"de banaan"* (the banana). We were thrilled and did everything possible to help them. Asnat's brother Joktan, born a few years later, is my godson.

Years later a teenaged Asnat spent many weeks living with us in New York. She was a pleasure to have around and always had a Belgian joke to tell. Bram was so fond of Asnat that he actually accompanied her to Bloomingdales, where she spent time having her face made up. Now a tour guide in Israel and mother to several children, we continue to maintain very close contact.



Other treasured guests from Holland: Sal van Gelder and his son, Bas, and two daughters Hanneke and Mirjam from Bussem; Hans and Shelly Bloemendaal—her sister married Bram's cousin Abraham Lopes Cardozo; and later Michael Pinedo, the Krants and Cohen-Pareiras. Our guests infused our house with the spirit and sounds of the "old country." As both our daughters were fluent in Dutch, if we had no other Shabbat guests we reverted to speaking Dutch—the language that was still our comforting *"mamaloshen."* All our Dutch visitors knew that the gifts we most treasured were special Dutch delicacies, like *krentebrood* (fruitcake with marzipan), *"speekulaas"* (spice cookies) and *bolle* (fried pastries) from Theebom (the kosher bakery in Amsterdam that recently closed); Dutch herring; *haagelslag* (Dutch chocolate sprinkles or jimmies); *zoute drop"* (salty black licorice candies); *muisjes* (sugar-covered anise seeds) and special kosher cheeses.

Sal van Gelder was a lover of *hazzanut.* He was a successful businessman who was always spirited and upbeat. Bram knew him from before the war. When he burst into our living room once a year, he brought with him tremendous joy and the latest news from Holland. His son Bas was also delightful and highly intelligent. I remember Bas driving us to visit the girls at summer camp in Pennsylvania. At some point in the ride he realized that he was

going in the wrong direction. We held our breath and our hats as he proceeded to swiftly drive over the grassy highway divider to the correct side of the road.

It was Sal who in 1965 offered Bram the position of rabbi in Bussem—an offer we ultimately turned down because our girls would not have been able to have the same high level of Jewish education. It was nice fantasizing about life in the quiet Dutch countryside that would have included a house, car and small congregation, but we know we made the right decision. We continue to share a close connection with the family. Bas is a leading Dutch supporter of my beloved Jaffa Institute.

9

Neighbors and Neighborhood

Through over five decades of marriage, we lived and worked within a one-block radius. As newlyweds, we lived at 18 West 69th Street; and then moved to 18 West 70th Street, directly next door to the synagogue. The neighborhood has undergone many changes in fifty-five years. Lincoln Center was built, and with it the entire neighborhood blossomed. What was once a run-down area became an exciting young neighborhood, populated with dancers, musicians and artists. Lincoln Square Synagogue was established and became a magnet for young Jewish singles. West Side Institutional Synagogue was revived. Drisha opened its doors, Manhattan Day School moved to the neighborhood and Beit Rabban was founded. Through all these changes, certain things remained constant: the friendliness of the neighborhood store-owners and residents.



18 West 70th Street

Our nine-story building was a rental property for many years. Many apartments, including ours, were "rent-controlled." With the renaissance of the neighborhood, many buildings such as ours went co-op. Old tenants were dying out and relinquishing their apartments. A new crop of young professionals bought these apartments at premium prices. The lobby was renovated and an awning put up. We, along with the few remaining older tenants, are protected by law and cannot be evicted. We maintain our rent-controlled apartments with minimal support from the landlord.

The mailboxes at one time were situated right outside our door on the lobby level. We had daily interaction with everyone in the building and they took a liking to us. For such a varied group of people—Jewish, non-Jewish, some involved in the arts, models, a few gay couples—for the most part everyone got along well and helped each other. There were a few illustrious tenants over the years: soap opera actors, children's book authors, the singer Jerry Vale, Detective Serpico's partner, composer Ned Rorem, pianist Earl Wilde. We also knew the many dog-tenants (most friendly with a few memorable exceptions.) Anti-Semites had anti-Semitic dogs. Sweet people, like the Rowes, had dogs who followed in their ways. Margaret Fiedler, who I have known since her childhood, cares for her dogs like children.

Louise Nagel

Years ago there was a thin, reserved, older lady who lived on the fifth floor. One day, sitting in the lobby opening her mail, she heard music coming from our apartment. She courageously rang our bell and introduced herself in an educated German accent as Louise Nagel. She was from Vienna and came to NY after the war. She was a gifted musician and played the piano to the delight of our musical

girls. She and Judy became very attached and she began bringing her records of the Cleveland Orchestra, conducted by Maestro George Szell, as gifts. They would listen to them on a regular basis and Judy would conduct with a strand of uncooked spaghetti. Louise explained that they were gifts from "your fairy godmother"—who turned out to be her cousin, Mrs. George Szell. This fairy godmother often sent goodies including a big box of oranges when Judy was sick.

Suddenly, Louise stopped coming down to visit and stopped going out. We reached out to her, but she refused to engage in any kind of conversation with us. Judy was devastated. We would leave food at her door, ring the bell and leave. That is how she wanted it. It was clear she was very sick and wanted her privacy respected. We worried, called her cousin Mrs. Szell, but there was nothing more we could do except to provide her with home-cooked food. When she died, she bequeathed her favorite ring to Judy.

70th Street: The Street Where We Live

Dr. and Mrs. Smulewicz

Dr. and Mrs. Smulewicz were both Polish survivors of the Holocaust who had come to the U.S. via Israel. They owned a few buildings in the neighborhood and lived in a brownstone on 70th Street with their children Daniel and Hedda. Although they were both religiously secular, Jacob regularly attended Friday night services at our synagogue; on occasion they joined us at our home around the Friday night table. He was an old-world aristocrat and a well-respected radiologist. Renata managed their properties and could always be seen walking on the street with her German shepherd. She explained to me that in concentration camp, she swore to herself that if she survived she too would own a German shepherd

as did her Nazi tormentors. Sadly, the Smulewicz's life together ended when Dr. Smulewicz became ill and died. Their housekeeper, a Polish woman named Bratslava, is as old as I am, but has the strength and energy of a young person. She helped us greatly in our home as well and was especially helpful when Bram was not well. I will always remember her kindness and loyalty.

The Freimans

We met the Freimans at a synagogue meeting. Both were psychiatrists who lived with their three dogs in a brownstone across the street. Their two daughters were older and no longer lived at home. They had he-and-she offices downstairs. Dr. Freiman, the husband, was Chief of Psychiatry at Goldwater Hospital on the East River. He had a wry sense of humor, like W.C. Fields, and enjoyed smoking a pipe. They collected *netsukes* (miniature 17th century Japanese sculptures) and their house was filled with Asian art and artifacts.

When Debby went to study in Israel for her sophomore year, Judy was finally able to spread out and enjoy her own room. As our resident artist, Judy needed room for all her projects. We worried about what would happen when Debby would come home.

The Freimans made us an offer we could not refuse: Debby could live on their third floor in exchange for her typing their reports. This arrangement greatly pleased Debby, who now had the option of sleeping there or at home.

Debby learned an immense amount from typing their reports, many of which were for insurance companies. The husband, as a neuropsychiatrist, was a genius at ferreting out really sick people from fakers. Debby marveled at how he described his first impressions of people, analyzing their gait and stance. The Freimans were gracious and lovely. In the morning, she was invited to join them

for coffee and at night she would sit in the sitting room with them as they read and nibbled on macadamia nuts.

The Freimans used a man named Nick to do their house cleaning. They recommended him to us and I was very happy to have someone help me do the heavy work in the house. He was very strong and capable and there was nothing he couldn't do. One day Nick tried to kiss me. I immediately called the Freimans and told them I no longer wanted him working for me. After Debby married she also hired Nick. One day he showed Jay, Debby's husband at the time, a diagram of heaven. Jay, a medical doctor, realized that Nick was a schizophrenic with a very shaky hold on reality. I again called the Freimans. This time I learned that Nick had come to them because he had served jail time for murder. He was on probation and a patient and they were trying to help him in whatever way they could.

101 Central Park West

The apartment building we frequented more than any other was 101 CPW. This building was home for several famous people including television news anchor Peter Jennings and actor Harrison Ford. But for us, even back in our single days, this address represented a home away from home. Bram and I often visited Ivan and Sophie Salomon who resided there. Later, the Bendheim home—where (as the song written for Philip's bar mitzvah says) "the door is always open, with a welcome sign on the mat" was a place where Bram and I and our girls spent a great many fun hours. There was a time when Charlie Bendheim's sister Gietchen lived in 101 with her family and husband Bill. Marvin and Aviva (Bendheim) Sussman live there now with their family. Our friends Muk and Vivian Eisenmann have lived there since they were first married. The Kaye family moved into 101 CPW from 30 West 70th Street. The Neumarks moved there from uptown. Chancellor emeritus of Yeshiva University Dr.

and Mrs. Norman Lamm live there now, in the apartment occupied by his predecessor, Dr. Samuel Belkin.

The Eisenmanns

We knew Muk Eisenmann in his bachelor days. I remember sitting on the porch in Long Beach on Shabbat morning and seeing Muk and his relative Johnny Steindecker walking past, happy and carefree. Johnny knew that we were close to the Bendheims who were his relatives and that we were liable to see his parents at their house sometime on Shabbat. He said: "When you see my father, tell him you saw me praying at the Belgians."

Later Muk married Vivian and moved to 101 CPW. Their Shabbat meals were gourmet and the company lively. He became very involved at Lincoln Square synagogue and Vivian became a successful travel agent.

Muk and Vivian can be very proud of the children they raised. Their daughter Esther is married to a lovely man and they have an adorable son and new daughter. Esther and her family live in 101 CPW. I have an open invitation to Esther's at any time. Their son Mark lives in Florida with his family. When he heard about the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti in 2009, he flew there immediately and helped to save the life of a young child by bringing her to the Children's Hospital in Florida for an emergency operation.

The Neumarks

Mel and Debbie Neumark brought their unparalleled entertainment style with them when they moved from uptown to 101 CPW. Debbie's parents, the Kramers, were also known for their hospitality. When Bram was single, the Kramers invited him for dinner,

knowing of his musical abilities. They too were a lively musical clan and Mr. Kramer assembled a family songbook. A funny story about Mr. Kramer: One morning, an obituary announcing his death appeared in the NY Times, complete with his picture. He was very much alive and well and being very good humored, made a big joke out of it.

Mel's parents were also very fine people. His mother Nellie had been a performer in the Yiddish Theatre in the '20s. She was an elegant lady with a beautiful singing voice, even at the age of ninety. At every family meal, she sang *"Eliyahu Ha-Navi"* in a pitch-perfect soprano voice. When she passed away, they tried to convince me, now the oldest lady at the table, to sing a solo!

When the Neumark family moved into the neighborhood, Mel and Debbie became valued members of the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue. Their son Avery expertly learned the Spanish and Portuguese *nusah* from Bram; he was already extremely well-versed in Ashkenazic *hazzanut*. When Bram died I entrusted Avery with all his notebooks about the services. Avery, his lovely wife Susan (nee Adler), and their children are learned in Torah and are involved in community life. They have greatly enhanced the Orthodox character of our synagogue.

Debbie and Mel's dinner parties, Shabbatot and holiday celebrations are legendary. Aside from the delicious food, the company is always lively and each person around table is given special attention. Often, the meal is organized around a theme that Debbie brilliantly translates into food, table decorations and party favors. On one of Bram's birthdays, she gave him a mug inscribed with the following saying: "The human voice is the only instrument made by G-d."

72nd Street and Environs

Most people don't realize that neighborhoods in New York are like little villages. We have always shopped locally and have maintained close and warm relationships with the shopkeepers in our area.

Arnel Dry Cleaners on the corner of 70th Street and Columbus Avenue has been in that location for over 40 years. The owner Leon and his assistant Audrey have been friends in good times and bad. They regularly do work for the synagogue and always insisted on cleaning Bram's *tallit* as a gift to him. A Jew who went through the Holocaust and then fought in the War of Independence, Leon still speaks fluent Hebrew, and never fails to do *mitzvot* at every opportunity. When Bram fell and broke his hip, it was right at the corner. They came running out to help.



Said (pronounced Sa-eed), our pharmacist, is an Egyptian Moslem who represents all the good qualities of a truly religious person. He never misses his Friday services and he goes out of his way to be kind and helpful to everybody. He loved Bram and has a picture of him hanging in his store.



Our butchers "Hecht and Minkowitz" had a store on 72rd Street and Columbus and saw to it that we had the best kosher meat. Max Hecht was well-respected by the rabbis and was given the keys to all the West Side kosher butcher shops; during *hol haMoed* he would water the meat

as required every three days. Molly and Max Hecht lived on 76th Street. Our Judy was and remains very close with their daughter Shoshana who was born to them late in his life. He was a good-tempered man despite the incredibly hard work he had to do. Once, the heavy door to the freezer closed behind him, locking him in for hours; his lungs were never the same. When they closed their shop, we bought our beef, liverwurst etc. from butchers under the supervision of Rabbi Breuer, in Washington Heights. We also discovered "the chicken man" as we called him—a religious Jewish chicken farmer from Vineland, NJ who delivered frozen kosher chicken to our door. At the time that I bought chickens from "the chicken man" I asked my Washington Heights butcher for chicken feet which make a good, strong soup. Aware that I was buying my chickens elsewhere, he answered: "Lady, chicken feet come with chickens."



Clothing and Hats

Aside from the four of us, my hats and hatboxes filled the house. I was always told that I had a "hat face." That meant that hats of all kinds looked good on me. When marriage necessitated covering my hair, I happily cultivated my hat addiction.

There were two lovely ladies both by the name of Francis who looked out for all the fashionable hats for me. Our dearest Frances Amram (whom we called *"Schatje"* which means sweetie in Dutch) was like a beloved aunt to Debbie and Judy. Judy was always artistic and loved to visit with her. She was a very fine and talented person who never married. Her brother used to come from Belgium to see her. Unfortunately, he died while here on a visit. We will always

remember her. She lived on 120 West 70th Street. "Francis Hats" was a small store on 72nd Street; that Frances lived at 114 West 70th Street. It was a great blow when both Franceses passed away at the same time.



I always loved nice clothing. There was a dress store on 72nd Street named after its owner, Malva, where I shopped often. Later, I was a regular customer at Tamara Boutique on the East Side. I was very friendly with all the sales ladies in the store who knew my price range and what I liked to wear. It was always fun to pass by and stop in. One of the sales ladies was Marilyn who, when I first met her, was a single mother supporting herself and her sons. She later re-married and we became good friends. We were in touch until her untimely death. The gifted seamstress Collette is still a close friend. She does incredible work, and I recommend her to anyone looking for a fine dressmaker.



Tip Top Shoes on 72nd Street started out as a shoe store for good, sensible shoes, frequented by older clientele. We befriended the owners, the Wasserman family. When their son Danny took over, the store was enlarged and renovated and today offers an amazing array of both comfortable and fashionable shoes. It even spawned a separate children's store, where I buy my great-grandson all his shoes. On a Sunday both stores are so packed with patrons from all over that it is hard to find seating.

I had a wonderful *sheitel macher* named Caroline Teitz. She came from Riga and was full of stories and recollections from the Old Country and her period as a young child in Siberia during the Holocaust. Her life had been saved by a priest. Despite her hard life, she looked like a beautiful porcelain doll and was full of energy. She was very talented; she made wigs for the Metropolitan Opera.



Domestic Help

Once the girls were born, I needed extra help with the household chores. There was laundry, cleaning and vacuuming that had to be done mid-week. From one Shabbat to another, there was a lot to do. When we moved to 70th Street, I hired Ida, a woman recommended by the local pharmacist's wife. She assisted me every week and was a nice woman, but I noticed that whenever she went to do the laundry in the basement of the building she would come back very "high." One day, I found some drug paraphernalia that she had inadvertently left in the bathroom; I had to let her go. Our neighbor Mrs. Halper recommended I hire Sarah Archer. For twenty years, Sarah came from Harlem to help with cleaning and laundry. She was a dignified lady with a fine character. We were very fond of each other. One day, little Judy asked her "Why are you so black?" I saw that she was deeply hurt and I proceeded to deliver a hearty smack. Judy ran out, very embarrassed and then quickly came back to give Sarah a kiss. The kids loved her very much. She was born in the South and in her later years moved back to North Carolina with her husband.

One day I met a young married woman in the park. She loved my children, since she didn't have any of her own. There was something so happy and strong about her; the children adored her and could not wait for her to visit. In exchange for a token payment, Margie Haight assisted me with the cooking and babysitting. It was a great help since I always had a house filled with people. She liked the food that we cooked and I always gave her some to take home. At one point, her husband did not want her to come to us anymore, but she always found a way. However, she gave her secret away when she served him my soup for dinner. She was the best babysitter—whenever Bram and I went out she would clean the house, give the girls a bath, and put them to bed. When we would come home at night and check on our Debbie and Judy, they were tucked in bed and looked like two little dolls. I will always have fond memories of Margie.



The Jewish Scene

When we first lived in the West 60s-70s, there wasn't very much going on for Orthodox people in the neighborhood. Most of the "action" was at Jewish Center on 86th Street, Young Israel and Ohab Zedek in the West '90s. It wasn't until Lincoln Center was built in 1964 that the neighborhood and its Jewish life blossomed. That, together with the rejuvenated Carlebach *shtiebel*, made for a vibrant Jewish scene. The Spanish and Portuguese became one of the more exotic synagogues and was very popular on Tisha B'Ab night.

Many years ago, on a very cold freezing Friday, Els Bendheim called and told me she was going away for a few days. The new young

rabbi of the Lincoln Towers complex, Rabbi Riskin and his wife Vicky were supposed to come to her for dinner and she wanted to know if I could take over entertaining them for the evening. I did so happily. Vicky was in the late stages of pregnancy; together we had a wonderful time. Rabbi Riskin was not only charismatic but a real "mensch." He totally changed the entire Jewish community. Starting in a small ground floor apartment in one of the buildings in the Lincoln Tower complex, Rabbi Riskin was so inspirational that the community grew by leaps and bounds. Up to today he never forgets how far back our acquaintance goes; he always greets me warmly when I see him. His sister Judy married Roy Stern, one of Bram's pupils, and a son of good friends. We were at the wedding and attended the bar mitzvah of their son in Israel. Our relationship with Lincoln Square Synagogue also included Cantor Goffin, Rabbi Cohen z"l and Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald.

To this day, I have warm feelings for this synagogue. Rabbi Shaul Robinson was the new rabbi at Lincoln Square when Bram died. He graced us with his presence at the funeral. When I was honored by Manhattan Day School in 2009, I gave a very short speech which moved him. The next day, he called Aviva and asked where he could contribute in Bram's memory in Israel. I received a check from him for Jaffa Institute the next week.

10

Projects and Organizations

Although the synagogue was central to my life, many other projects within the Jewish community beckoned. I started with local organizations but soon became deeply involved with global causes, most especially in our beloved Eretz Yisrael. A common theme running through all my involvements has been support of Jewish education, and helping immigrants, the handicapped and poor children.



Beginning Forays

I credit the members of Shearith Israel's Polonies Talmud Torah PTA with encouraging me to assume the presidency of their organization. Although our girls went to Manhattan Day School, they often went to the Talmud Torah on Sunday mornings to participate in the many celebrations and activities. The girls were superb

envelope stuffers, and were pretty tolerant of the stacks of white envelopes that often overwhelmed our small dining room table.

Various organizations started to seek me out. I was a good worker, capable organizer and eager volunteer. The job no one seemed to ever want was recording secretary. Taking minutes and transcribing them was a big job, but one that did not faze me since I was used to hard office work. I cannot count the number of times I would hear "no one takes minutes like Irma." Here they were, American born college graduates, and I could take better minutes than them? How could that be? I believe it is because I had a superb education. It is well-known that many "colonies" of European nations had excellent educational systems. In my case, perhaps it is also because Paramaribo was a place with very few distractions. Education was valued and we were diligent students. I also credit our Nina, who was born in Barbados, with my English language skills.

One of my most amazing discoveries about myself was that I am a born fundraiser. I am never afraid to ask for money if it is for a good cause. I remember vividly soliciting an esteemed member of the synagogue board, with Judy in tow. When he volunteered a measly sum, much below his means, I asked, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" Judy was so embarrassed she did not know where to put herself.

Central Sephardic Jewish Community of America and its Women's Division

The organization was started by Rabbi Nissim J. Ovadia and his wife, Mrs. Mazal Ovadia. At the beginning of the war they fled Paris, where Rabbi Ovadia had an important congregation, and came to the United States. A remarkable leader, Rabbi Ovadia succeeded in uniting eighteen different Sephardic groups—from countries

and cultures as diverse as Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Syria, Iran and the United States under one umbrella. He led the organization until his death in 1942. After that it was led by Dr. Isaac Alcalay, a scholar, rabbi and statesman from Yugoslavia. Both were revered figures who commanded respect and admiration from Sephardim and Ashkenazim alike.

There was a Men's Division and a Women's Division. As is often the case, the Women's Division became the more vibrant and successful group. They invited me to join and I was very happy to do so. I was immediately asked to be the Recording Secretary and was soon promoted to Vice President and then to President, a position I held for thirteen years. The organization was comprised of very spirited women with strong personalities and keeping order at meetings was not easy.

These women were all talented cooks and bakers and our luncheons were always delicious and very successful. The treasury was growing and we looked for new opportunities. The New York Times Culinary Division took an interest in publishing some of these exclusive Sephardic recipes but in the end, they went elsewhere for their information. We did not allow our disappointment to get the better of us. I suggested publishing our own cookbook, with Emilie Levy as project director. Together with her committee, they tested each and every recipe and put together a great cookbook that we published and reprinted many times. Her daughter Gloria and Fortuna Calvo-Roth co-chaired the successful project. I helped raise the money.

The Women's Division supported many important Sephardic causes including: The Sephardic Home for the Aged; Alliance Universelle Israelite; Otzar HaTorah; and many others. They also worked very closely with the Sephardic Studies Program of Yeshiva University.

Rabbi Mitch Serels was in charge of the Sephardic students at Y.U. and would often call upon us to help clothe and feed the boys.

After many years of good work, it was decided to merge all the committees of the organizations—the men's division and women's division of the CSJCA—with Secondary Education. Membership kept dwindling, to the point that a decision was made to dissolve the organization. The very capable treasurer, Laura Capelluto, and I distributed the remaining funds to schools and Jewish organizations in Israel and the U.S.

Secondary Education in Israel

Mrs. Henry Hendricks (Rosalie) came from an old and respected Spanish and Portuguese family. She was a "Daughter of the American Revolution" as was Mona Oppenheim's mother—Mrs. Ferdinand Oppenheim. In the 1960s, Rosalie Hendricks and Mrs. Minnie Rapp were approached by the Jewish Agency to assist in raising money for secondary education for poor Sephardic children in Israel. For various political reasons, I was not invited to be a member of this group. Nonetheless, I was happy to give them my time and attended their functions. Two women from this group became very close friends of mine —Sarah Ezratty and Lucy (Amado) Touriel. They were both very good humored ladies, and I was very fond of them. Sarah Ezratty was like a mother to me and gave me a lot of support in difficult times.

On a snowy morning in January, Lucy's husband called me and asked me to come over immediately. Lucy had a stroke and had fallen out of her bed. I called Sarah Ezratty who lived across the street from her to come as well. We managed to get her up and into a cab to Mt. Sinai Hospital. She never fully recovered; later she could no longer function on her own and was placed in the

Sephardic Home for the Aged where her husband eventually joined her. She had been the Treasurer of Secondary Education and had not dealt with any of her paperwork for a long time. At the request of her husband I came over to put some order into the chaos of all the financial papers of the organization. After this, the group asked me to join them. The founders were getting older and they could not handle the work anymore.

Shearith Israel Sisterhood

For many years there was a vibrant Sisterhood at the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue. The women on the Board took their assignments very seriously and fulfilled their tasks with enthusiasm. Among the Sisterhood projects were the annual theatre party, decorating and serving in the *succah,* providing the flowers on *Shabuot*, luncheons, visiting the sick and much more. Moneys raised by the Sisterhood supported the synagogue itself (Torah mantles, the *succah*, *Shabuot* flowers) and special projects like the Israeli *yishuv* (settlement) Dalton in the upper Galilee. There was also an annual camp fund, started by Mrs. Elsie Adelman. In addition to the President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Recording Secretary, there was a special secretary who wrote thank you letters and condolence notes. Then there were committee chairmen responsible for various specific functions, such as the *succah* and upkeep of the *sefer* mantles. Women like Rose Harte, who took care of the *succah* for so many years, and Laura Capelluto, who gave of herself generously to so many projects, dedicated their hearts and souls to beautifying the synagogue.

Sometimes the meetings were very stormy and unpleasant and I would walk out with a bad headache. In honor of the Tercentenary of Jews in the U.S., Mrs. Esther Oppenheim and her daughter Mona took charge of producing a set of commemorative plates picturing

all of the synagogue buildings of Congregation Shearith Israel. This project did not get going easily but in the end was worthwhile. A complete limited edition set of these plates was presented to President Eisenhower.

The Sisterhood was at the center of the controversy about women's role in the synagogue long before feminism came into fashion. For a long time the women of the Sisterhood wanted a Sisterhood representative on the Board of Trustees. One day I met the president of the Sisterhood on the street. She let me know that if she sat on the Board of Trustees (and became its first female member) she would fight for my husband's rights. I was against having women on the Board and I told her I wasn't interested. Our synagogue service includes the active participation of Board members and if women were to be on the Board there is a danger that they would then ask for their equal rights to hold the Torah during Kol Nidre, and to be elected to top positions and sit in front of the synagogue where there are special *"bancas"* (benches) for the *parnas presidente* (President) and *segan* (Vice President). I was worried that women on the Board of Trustees could lead directly to mixed seating and women participating in the service.

Together with Selma Guedalia, we began circulating a petition against this idea. Irving Elias took the petition to the Board of Trustees meeting and when the subject came up for a vote, he presented them with the petition. What a shock! It completely upset their plans. A few days later, Selma and I met two Sisterhood ladies in the elevator. They lashed out at us and insulted us. We were also admonished by the Board. Eventually, the issue was dropped. Now, many years later, there are women on the Board. So much has changed.

On the issue of women in the synagogue, I remember how many years ago on Kippur night, a handful of feminists pushed their way

into the big synagogue just when the *hazzan* was singing the Kol Nidre. The congregation did not know what was happening. We were all in shock because of this noisy intrusion on this holiest of days. The police were called and removed them. We found out later that this group of women went from one Orthodox synagogue to another and tried to force their way into the men's sections. They wanted to protest the fact that women do not have "equal rights" in Orthodox Judaism. How could these women consider themselves religious when they were disturbing prayer on the holiest day of the Jewish year? Some might call me old-fashioned, but I stay away from women's services and am very concerned that our *minhagim* and way of life are threatened by these new developments.

Today I serve as co-president of Sisterhood, together with Carla (Salomon) Schein (who was a bridesmaid at my wedding). Sadly, in the last twenty years, Sisterhood has not grown because more and more women work outside the home and have less time for organizational life. I am so heartened to see that Laura Capelluto's daughter, Betty, has lovingly taken over the care of the Torah mantles.

Maimonides Institute for Retarded Children

In the 1960s, a group of Orthodox women, including Shoshana Lunzer of blessed memory, joined together with some rabbis in creating a special school for retarded children. The Maimonides Institute for Retarded Children, located in Far Rockaway, took off with great enthusiasm. Many women worked diligently to make this worthwhile institution a workable organization. Money was coming in and significant funds were raised at parties and luncheons. All of a sudden financial problems were uncovered. In no time the beautiful heartfelt work of the ladies was finished. Tragically, the school closed not long after.

Mrs. Wilma Frankel, mother of my friend Rahel Bloch, asked me to help her with her organization that assisted poor families in the Romema neighborhood of Jerusalem. It was also *"anti-shmad,"* fighting the influence of missionaries. I worked very hard to bring in money, together with my close friend and mentor "Peppy" Lewin (the wife of Rabbi Dr. Isaac Lewin.) Everything was going well until we began to notice certain things that made us uncomfortable. Peppy and I started asking questions, and discovered that our good friends "Rivi" Skydell and Hugo Kahn were asking the same questions. We never questioned the wonderful work done by Mrs. Frankel and the many good things that the organization was doing in Israel. It was the American operation that was troubling, in the area that today is called "transparency." Peppy and I felt we could no longer raise money on their behalf so we resigned.

HIAS and NYANA

Many refugees from all over the world came knocking at our door. Whatever I was doing, however busy I was, I tried my best to help whomever I could. A group of North African Jews, mainly Egyptian, arrived, under the aegis of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and New York Association for New Americans (NYANA). They were all placed in a hotel on Broadway and 70th Street, not far from where we live. There these people felt out of place and some of them did not know a soul in this very big city. It seemed that all the Egyptian refugees were arriving at the same time. Many had some relatives, but most depended on HIAS and NYANA. The hotel they were staying in was filthy, full of cockroaches and mice. I felt sorry that these people had to live in such conditions. I devoted a lot of time to helping them move into better quarters.

NYANA asked me what I could do to help. This was around Pesach time, and I took some of them for the *Hagaddah* (the Pesach *seder*) but I didn't have places for all of them. Els Bendheim, my dear friend and someone whom I can always call on for help, came to the rescue and invited a very lovely family, the Ben Zakens. This family came from Libya: they were very fine people.

Another family by the name of Buchris, also from Libya, came with twelve children. What to do with this family? I had a brainstorm and called an old friend from Brooklyn, Rabbi Murray Maslaton—a Libyan Rabbi, who graciously agreed to accept these children into his Yeshiva. The family moved to Brooklyn and successfully settled there.

Many Egyptians refugees found a place for themselves in this new world. There were, however, many who never did. One woman came with a sick mother and a young daughter to care for. She was a very brilliant person who spoke many languages that she learned when she worked for the Chief Rabbi of Egypt. I tried to find her work, but there was nothing available for her. Eventually, they moved to Brooklyn; many people donated furniture, bedding, housewares etc. Her daughter married a man who also couldn't find work. They had two little boys and needed all the things required to have a good kosher home, such as *mezuzot* and the like. We managed to provide them with everything they needed. One day I got a hysterical call from the woman: her elderly mother had passed away. She did not know what to do or who to turn to for help. Through my good friend Stephen Shalom, the Sephardic Bikur Cholim paid all the expenses and made all the arrangements.

It was always a pleasure to work with so many effective and amazing community leaders. And it was so interesting and rewarding to meet immigrants from foreign lands who each came from very different ways of life. I learned a lot from these experiences.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

My relationship with Lubavitch began when they called me to help bring boys from Suriname to America. The initiative was the idea of Leo Benjamin, who lived in Suriname. I began working with Rabbi Bogomilsky, a young red-headed *hassid*, as well as the secretaries of the Rebbe. I vividly remember Rabbi Bogomilsky's wedding, the first *hassidic* wedding my family ever attended. When the boys came I worked directly with the London brothers who headed a high school called "Yeshivat Heichal Hatorah"in Brooklyn.

Rabbi Bogomilsky visited Suriname and met my family. When he returned, he brought back a young fellow by the name of David Kopinsky to study at Heichal Hatorah. A wonderful surprise awaited me: David was the son of my first cousin Corrie de Barrios, daughter of my father's sister. Rabbi Bogimilsky asked me to get some money together to assist with David's education. I made a telephone call to David Politi who was connected to the OU, and within an hour he was sitting in our living room with a check. I had done much charitable work with Mr. Politi and he was always ready to help me in return. Later on, Robert Salomon assumed the responsibility of paying for David's tuition.

Every Friday David came to spend Shabbat with us; we set up a cot in the living room so he could sleep in our home. He was a very pleasant young man. He was also with us the day that John F. Kennedy died. I had some Dutch guests over for dinner; everyone was sad and disturbed but David's calming presence helped us through a difficult evening. David was always eager to help; on Succot he would assist me by carrying pans of food to the Synagogue *succah*. When the Vietnam War was going on, Leo Benjamin was concerned that David might be drafted; he shipped him off to Holland. At a certain point, he went to Israel. He now is married and lives in Holland with his wife and children.

Throughout this time, I developed a close working relationship with the Rebbe's secretaries—Rabbis Groner and Krinsky. One day, I received a phone call that Leo Benjamin had passed away in Suriname. The Rebbe asked that I be called to vouch for the *kashrut* of the *taharah* he would receive. Based on my report, they decided he could be buried in Suriname.



Rabbi Aaron Schuster was the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Holland after WWII. He was invited by Ivan Salomon to visit New York. Friday night he ate with us and in talking he told the following story: his wife was in a diabetic coma and the doctors had given up hope. Somebody advised him to ask for a special *beracha* from the Rebbe, which he did. The next morning when he came to the hospital the doctor greeted him with unbelievable news. At some point in the night her situation changed radically—for the better! Rabbi Schuster felt strongly that the Rebbe's intercession helped in her miraculous recovery. I helped arrange for him to meet the Rebbe personally.

One Sunday morning I myself went to see the Rebbe. I was in the back of the crowded room and suddenly somebody brought me to the front. It seems that the Rebbe knew who I was. He looked me in the eye. Instead of giving me one dollar, he gave me two dollars. Rabbis Krinsky and Klein were sitting on an elevated platform in the room. All of a sudden I heard Rabbi Krinsky shout: "Hello, Mrs. Cardozo. How is Mrs. Bendheim?" The entire crowd turned around to see whom they were talking to!

Chabad's Children of Chernobyl

Over the years, I was privileged to work on many Lubavitch supported projects and initiatives, including Children of Chernobyl. I remember with great affection when Ruth and Yossi Reichik came to see me to ask for my help. Yossi Reichik, of blessed memory (he died so young and so suddenly in 2008) was instructed by the Lubavitch Rebbe to rescue children from the Chernobyl disaster and bring them to Kfar Chabad, where they could be treated for their pre-cancerous conditions stemming from the nuclear fallout. I called a few people and in no time I got $1200 together, which was a beginning, but I could not undertake the fundraising for them. The schools in Jaffa and Beth Shemesh keep me going, and at my age another project would be too much for me to undertake. My heart and love are with this beautiful work that is being done to assist the unfortunate children and to save their lives. In my little way I do what I can, and I want to keep in touch because I am very interested in the progress of this worthwhile organization. Yossi Reichik did a brilliant job, attracting movie stars like Kirk Douglas and Barbara Streisand to help the cause. As of the end of June, 2009, 2,580 children have been rescued from Chernobyl and are safe in the hands of Chabad and competent medical care in Israel.

Yeshiva University's Sephardic Studies Program

Some forty years ago, Herbert Dobrinsky, a young rabbi, approached us to join in the efforts of Yeshiva University to organize a Sephardic Studies Program. This project was the idea of Mr. Ivan Salomon and Dr. Samuel Belkin, President of Yeshiva University. They thought it was important to help promote Sephardic culture and to train Sephardic rabbis and teachers within an Orthodox setting.

We immediately contacted some Sephardim whom we knew because I was closely associated with the Sephardic Women and the Central Sephardic Jewish Community of America. I gathered a group together to meet with the young Rabbi Dobrinsky and learn more about the organization. I assisted him as much as I could. At the beginning many Sephardim were very reluctant to join; the Sephardim of the Cedarhurst Synagogue especially did not want to hear about this. They were very busy building their own Sephardic Temple. Their rabbi was a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary and they wanted a more liberal synagogue. Some of their congregants wanted mixed seating and others wanted to have separate seating.

One summer while we were vacationing in Long Beach (a neighboring community to Cedarhurst), Bram was asked to speak in the Sephardic Synagogue in Rabbi Abittan's absence. It was *Shabbat Hazon*, the Shabbat before Tisha B'Ab, and Bram saw this as a great opportunity to give the Cedarhurst community a push in the right direction. His message was: Sephardim, keep your tradition and do not change. This speech made an impression. It was printed with the help of Ivan Salomon and caused something of a stir but, after a very long time and much persuasion, many of the people in the Cedarhurst community responded and started showing an interest in Yeshiva University's Sephardic Studies Program. Some of them gave money to Y.U. but earmarked their gift for the Einstein Medical School.

When Dr. Solomon Gaon settled in the U.S., he was appointed Chairman of the Sephardic Program together with Rabbi Dobrinsky and Rabbi Mitch Serels. Bram taught *hazzanut* classes in the program and met many wonderful young Sephardic boys. The girls remember this period fondly because he would return late from Washington Heights with what was at that time a rarity—kosher pizza. Many of the boys went on to become rabbis and lead

important congregations. Little by little more and more young men came to the new program to study to be rabbis and teachers. Some needed scholarships and it was with the assistance of the Maybaum Foundation and Tomas Ryan, who was the lawyer in charge of this fund, that they were able to do so. As President of the Women's Division of the Central Sephardic Jewish Community, I was able to suggest and approve many little projects. Rabbi Serels always knew that he could call on me—this happened many times—to assist with some boys who had no funds to buy food and necessities, and they always got what they asked for. The Sephardic Program is very successful: boys and girls from Syria, Morocco, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Europe, South America and many other places are being educated to this day with their help. I am on the board of the Sephardic Council and attend their meetings.

Rabbi Dobrinsky never seemed to tire of traveling throughout the country to raise funds for this new project; he was very successful in this endeavor. Sometimes Bram, Dr. Gaon and I would join him and most of the time it was a lot of fun. Dr. Gaon would completely charm the audience with his emotional rendition of old Ladino songs that for many in the audience reminded them of their rich Sephardic heritage.

Here is an amusing story: Rabbi Dobrinsky and I went to see a very rich gentleman at the store he owned. Initially he was very happy to see us, however, when we told him that we came to ask him for a contribution, his tune changed. We sensed that we were in for a hard time. We had a stroke of good fortune when the front door opened and his wife came in. She greeted us cordially and inquired why we were visiting. Her husband did not want her to know that we were soliciting funds; to get rid of us quickly, he shoved a check for $5000 into our hands and practically pushed us out the door. We could not stop laughing all the way home. Until this day when Herb and I talk about this incident, we still laugh.

The American Sephardi Federation

The miraculous Six Day War and the difficult Yom Kippur War ushered in a new era. There was a great awakening in the Jewish world, which stirred up Sephardic communities as well.

In the early 1970's, Nissim Gaon of Geneva and others had spearheaded the birth of a World Sephardi Federation (WSF). Through their influence, the grass roots movements of Sephardim in communities around the world blossomed into the birth of WSF. The Jewish Agency-World Zionist Organization assigned a *shaliah* to organize the American Sephardi community and develop an American Sephardi Federation. For this job they chose a very bright and energetic Israeli of Moroccan origin named Mati Ronen. The only problem was that Mati did not speak or write English very well. In June, 1973, Debby graduated Barnard College and was looking for gainful employment. A *shidduch* was made between Mati and Debby—a truly perfect combination. Debby was an English major with excellent writing skills; she was also fluent in Hebrew. In addition, she was young and eager to reach out to other Sephardim across the country. Her position was Director of Young Leadership and Assistant to the Executive Director. Her salary was paid half by the Jewish Agency (the office was in the Israel Aliyah Center at 515 Park Avenue) and half by the newly-created American Sephardi Federation (ASF).

ASF flourished—and so did Debby. She organized the first Sephardi youth convention in Atlanta, GA, attracting close to five hundred youth and leaders from across North America. She helped Mati lead summer trips to Israel for youth focusing on the social problems facing Sephardi immigrants. She arranged for prominent Israeli Sephardim, including ambassadors and UN delegates, to speak around the country. As part of her work, she represented ASF at the General Assembly (GA) of the Council of Jewish Federations

and Welfare Funds. There she met an alumna from her high school, who was attending Yeshiva University's Wurzweiler School of Social Work. Debby learned that the work she was doing at ASF—and loving so passionately—was community organization social work, and that Wurzweiler had started a special master's degree program in that very area. Debby applied to the program, was accepted, and so left ASF to receive formal training in what has been her life's calling.

ASF today is housed in the Center for Jewish History building. It is a recognized part of the establishment. Of course the excitement of those first years is hard to recapture; it was wonderful to have been there when it all began.

Misgav Ladach Hospital

After the Yom Kippur War, Dr. Gaon asked me to help reorganize Misgav Ladach Hospital in Jerusalem, and put them back on their feet. The hospital was an institution belonging to the Sephardic community that had a fascinating history.

Until 1854, the only medical treatment available to Jews in Jerusalem was from missionaries. Jews would literally die without treatment rather than place themselves in the hands of those who would cure their bodies but attempt to rob them of their Jewish souls. In 1854, the first Jewish hospital in the Holy City, and in fact in the entire country, was opened, funded by the Rothschild Family. Called the Meir Rothschild Hospital, it operated in the Old City until 1888 when it moved together with other Rothschild-funded institutions to the New City. The building was sold to the Bikur Holim-Misgav Ladach Society, comprised of prominent members of the Sephardic community in the Yishuv. Misgav Ladach had a synagogue and full time *kollel* of ten men, called the S'deh Hemed Yeshiva, in whose

merit it was hoped all the sick would be healed. The hospital was renowned for its excellent and compassionate care of all peoples. It remained the only Jewish hospital in the Old City; in 1948, it was destroyed by the Jordanians.

Due to the valiant efforts of the director, shortly after the Jordanian conquest the hospital established itself in the Katamon section of the New City, limiting its services to maternity and gynecology. When the Old City was re-conquered in the Yom Kippur War, the Sephardic community was determined to re-build the hospital. That was where they brought me into the picture. I had to start from scratch. In short order, I organized a committee of American Friends, and an ambulance was sent with tons of linens, blankets, medicine and money. Among those who played a vital role were Mrs. Renee Herman and Dr. Hans Schapira both relatives of Dr. Maccabi Saltzberger, the Medical Director of the hospital. The idea of a new hospital was exciting, and as chairman of the American Friends, I worked hard to see this dream fulfilled.

Many people and institutions helped build the new Misgav Ladach. Through physicians we knew, we were able to obtain all sorts of medical equipment that, although perfectly useable, was no longer cutting edge in the U.S. but in Israel was most welcome. My neighbor Dr. Smulewicz, director of Radiology at Beth Israel, helped us get x-ray equipment that was being replaced. At the time, Ehud Olmert was Israeli Minister of Health. Through his office, we got El Al to ship the equipment and supplies free of charge

After a while Rabbi Arnold Marans and the Rousso family took over leadership of the American Friends. I became the secretary-treasurer. In a short time the hospital was doing tremendously good work. Women who gave birth there, particularly those with special problems, were very appreciative of the care they received.

Unfortunately Dr. Saltzburger did not live to see the fruits of his labors.

On a Friday afternoon when we were visiting Israel Dr. Saltzberger called me to please come to the hospital to say *tehillim* for the wife of the singer Yehoram Gaon who was very ill during the birth of a baby boy before Shabbat. We have been friends with Yehoram Gaon for a long time, having met him through his relative, Dr. Solomon Gaon. It was a very emotional afternoon before Shabbat. Thank G-d, a lovely baby boy was born. His *brit* was a feast fit for a king and was celebrated at Misgav Ladach Hospital. Most of Jerusalem was invited.

The governor of Massachusetts Mike Dukakis was visiting Israel when his wife Kitty, who was Jewish, fell ill. Dr. Saltzberger helped her and she was very indebted. We proposed that she be the guest of honor at our first luncheon and she accepted graciously. She spoke simply but passionately about her experience at Misgav Ladach and the luncheon was a huge public relations and fundraising success.

In addition to serving as a "Lying In" and gynecological center, Misgav Ladach had a special room reserved for performance of *britei milah* to adult immigrants. Under the aegis of Brit Avot, as many as eight immigrants from the former Soviet Union per day received a *brit milah* from the legendary Dr. Tzatzkis and Rabbi Aaron Kramer. Every *brit* was followed by a *seudah* complete with singing and dancing. Because of Dr. Tzatzkis' skill as both an urologist and seasoned *mohel*, even the recipient of the *brit* participated in the dancing! I had the privilege of attending such a *brit milah* celebration and was very moved.



Ultimately, Misgav Ladach Hospital was a great disappointment. Every few months there were changes in the administration and charges of irregularities. In no time, the hospital was bankrupt and many wonderful doctors, nurses and personnel lost their jobs. Salaries and pensions could not be paid anymore; the government found it necessary to close the hospital. No one could understand what had taken place. Even until today we do not know why the government sold the building.

Funds that remained in the coffers of the American Friends of Misgav Ladach as well as additional donations have gone to good use. A large legacy of Dr. Irving Benveniste of Los Angeles was recently used to create a walk-in pediatric infirmary at AMIT's Bet Hayeled in Jerusalem. For all those who represented the hospital for decades, notably Rabbi Arnold Marans, this was most gratifying.

What happened at Misgav Ladach makes me sad for all the work and efforts we put in. This is what happens with many wonderful institutions and organizations where a few corrupt individuals gain power and bring about the downfall of the entire enterprise.

AKIM
(The National Association for the Habilitation of the Mentally Retarded in Israel)

When AKIM opened its NY office, they invited me to be an officer on their Board. I believed strongly in the cause of helping children with mental and physical disabilities. In Israel especially, where so much of the government's funds are earmarked for security, there was a need to solicit help from Jews around the world. The director was a vivacious French-Moroccan woman who put together an excellent board. She invited me to join the first Israeli delegation ever to the Special Olympics, which was being held in New

Orleans. It was going to be a very special mission. In addition to encouraging the young handicapped athletes, the trip was going to raise awareness and money for AKIM and for the State of Israel.

Israel's consul general Naftali Lavie (brother of Rabbi Lau) and his wife led the group. The counselors, coaches and handicapped Israeli boys and girls were truly special people. We were shocked to see the assimilation of the Jews in New Orleans and the high rate of intermarriage. We tried to raise money for Israel Bonds, but the whole business became very awkward because many community leaders there were so assimilated they felt uncomfortable discussing Israel in public. We had to meet with some donors on the sly, in private suites. It was really quite awful.

Soon after, I asked Belda Lindenbaum if she would host an AKIM fund-raising meeting in her home. She put herself out and organized a lovely brunch. Unfortunately, the director did not mail the invitations out on time and when the day came, she herself brought a few guests and we raised several thousand dollars. Months after this event, I was told that one of the guests stole a silver dish from Belda's home. Belda, ever a lady, never told me about this incident. The organization continues to grow. I am grateful to my good friends Ivy and Marvin Schildkraut who invited Bram and I to be their guests at Akim's inspiring annual dinner.

Joint Passover Association

For many years I had the privilege of serving as Vice President of the Joint Passover Association, which distributes food to the needy before Passover. This is a time of year when kosher food is especially expensive. JPA is an agency of UJA-Federation, and serves all kinds of Jews throughout Greater New York. I worked closely with many capable women, including Ruth Kobrin and others. The

Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese gave generously to this fund and I raised thousands of dollars in addition from friends and acquaintances.

As I write these words, Joint Passover Association will be disbanded and taken over by the Metropolitan Coordinating Council on Jewish Poverty, another UJA-Federation agency. It is not what we board members want, but we have no choice since they feel that this is necessary in these economically difficult times. My problem is that *Maot Chittim* (providing for the poor before Passover) is a distinct mitzvah. The Sisterhood used to give two separate donations: one to Met Council and one to Joint Passover Association. Now that the two will merge, Sisterhood will only be giving one gift. I am always uneasy when organizations merge. While Met Council does a fantastic job, it will be much harder to raise additional money for the special mitzvah of *Maot Chittim*. I pray that the merger will benefit the poor Jews of New York, of which there are many.

Jaffa Institute

My connection and devotion to Jaffa Institute and the Beth Shemesh Educational Center came through my daughter Debby. She met Dr. David Portowicz in her office at the Board of Jewish Education, when he asked her to help him with his project. In her role at BJE, she could not assist him, but she suggested he meet with me. We met soon after in our home. From the first moment we felt as if we had known each other for a long time. It has been more than 25 years that we are working together on this important project, and during this time we have watched with amazement as this organization has grown and expanded its reach.

The Institute for the Advancement of Education in Jaffa ("The Jaffa Institute") was established in 1982 as a private, non-profit,

multi-service social agency to assist thousands of severely disadvantaged children and their families. The Institute's mission is to provide educational, recreational and social enrichment programs that imbue children with a sense of self-worth by supporting their self-esteem so they can break the cycle of bitter poverty they were born into, and grow to be healthy, educated and productive adults. The Jaffa Institute's programs are aimed at children from the poverty-stricken areas of Jaffa, South Tel Aviv, Neve Ofer, Bat Yam, Kiryat Ha-Yovel (Jerusalem), and, through the Bet Shemesh Residential Center, from other impoverished regions in Israel.

As I grew to know more about Jaffa Institute, more and more people also got involved. Many new contacts and friends were made and David Portowicz personally nurtured them all. It is hard to say no to David because the work he does is so compelling. The rapport he has with each child is like that of loving father and mentor. David has many Jewish and Christian supporters in Holland, people Bram and I also knew. This strengthened our connection even more.

Bram and I were honored as Jaffa Institute supporters on October 19, 1997 in the *succah* of The Plaza Hotel in Jerusalem. The dinner brought in quite a lot of money and David insisted on dedicating the music room in the school in Beit Shemesh in our name. When we returned to Israel the next time, David invited us to the dedication of the music room. After Bram delivered a *dvar Torah* in the Beit Midrash, we all went to inaugurate the new music room. When the door opened, the beautiful boys of Jaffa Institute couldn't believe their eyes. Lining the walls were acoustic and electric guitars, several keyboards, several drum sets and a wide variety of other instruments! Judy and Sid were with us and had tears in their eyes seeing the joy that this gave these boys whom life had dealt some tough blows. Every visit to the school in Beit Shemesh is a delight. There is always a festive meal served. In years past, we knew a few of the boys personally and they always greeted us warmly. Many

of them have grown up, married and become upstanding adults. David attends each and every wedding because he feels they are all his children.

Wherever I can, I try to connect David to the best foundations. It was through a total coincidence (to a believer there is no such thing) that I met Jeff Keil, director of the Safra Foundation. When Bram was doing service at a *shivah* (Syrian people), I asked one of the ladies how I could get in touch with the people of the Safra Foundation. She pointed someone out to me so I walked right over, introduced myself to Jeff Keil, and made a wonderful contact. I made an appointment, and very soon David and I were preparing a proposal to present to them. Our friendship with Jeff Keil became a great asset and through him we met many other people who also became great friends and fans of Jaffa Institute.

The Portowicz family, Adeena, David and their children, are close friends. I even went on vacation to the Dead Sea for a few days with Adeena. David's fundraiser, Mitch Chupak, and Avril, his assistant, are very pleasant to work with. We are all very loyal to David and in awe of his tireless dedication to poor and needy children.

On one of our many visits to the Jaffa Institute Beth Shemesh Educational Center, we met a lovely boy. Bram and I kind of adopted him, and whenever he would see us him, he rushed over to show us his affection. This young man is an amazing success story: he went to *hesder* and then went to on to teach at the Educational Center. He is but one of the fruits of David Portowicz's vision. While each child is different, David and his capable staff help all the students develop and find their rightful place in Israeli society.

Jaffa Institute remains the cause nearest my heart. When Bram died, we decided to establish an endowment in his name for poor Bar Mitzvah boys. Each bar mitzvah boy is given a set of *tefillin*, new clothes and a special breakfast for their family. The group as a whole

is taken to the *kotel* for an *aliyah*, followed by a fun *seudat mitzvah* at a fine Jerusalem restaurant. Judy and Sid, my representatives in Israel, attended the ceremony of the first boys, all of whom were Ethiopian, and Sid spoke on our behalf. This is something that I know would have given Bram a lot of joy and satisfaction.

11

Retirement and Beyond

For all the gratification of serving the community, Bram was looking forward to being free of his congregational commitments. When he was 62 years old, he approached the Trustees and told them that he would eventually like to retire. It took ten years for this to finally happen. When it did, Bram maintained an excellent relationship with the synagogue. He was hired to cover for the vacationing rabbis during the summers and was given the opportunity to perform many holiday services.

Hazzanut was always Bram's greatest joy and these years afforded him the opportunity to lead the community in prayer without all the politics. He and I were invited to Philadelphia for the High Holidays and Rabbi Albert Gabbai always offered Bram the choicest services without overburdening him. He also honored him with delivering the sermon. These were our happiest years and very productive ones as well. I am so thankful that we could spread our wings a bit more than we were able to when we were employed at the synagogue.

The Road to Retirement

When Bram informed the Trustees of his desire to retire, they did not want to believe it. He was 62 years old and in good health. Who could replace him? After many conversations, they realized that sooner or later, they would have to find a suitable replacement and began searching for candidates. By far the most suitable and gifted was Daniel Halfon, who came from the London Spanish and Portuguese synagogue. He was very musical and had been taught by the wonderful Hazzan Abinun. It was a pleasure for Bram to teach him the nuances of the New York tradition and a great deal of time and energy went into training him to take over as *hazzan*. Daniel was passionately devoted to music, the *minhag* and the *halakhah*. He did not hesitate to express his thoughts on these matters and soon discovered that his opinions were not welcomed. This was not acceptable to him and he left. All the close friendships he made at the synagogue continue to this day. He and I are in regular contact and when I am in Israel I am happy to see his wonderful wife Valerie and his beautiful children, who are all very musical. He just came out with a CD of beautifully arranged Spanish and Portuguese music produced by Israel's Beit Hatefutsot (Diaspora Museum) which he dedicated in memory of Bram.



There were other candidates who followed. Albert Gabbai and his family came to the U.S. from Cairo. He and his brothers had been imprisoned during the Six Day War under the dictatorship of Nasser. They were among the few who insisted on eating *kasher* food in prison. From the top of their prison cell, they saw the strafing of Israeli jets—giving them great joy and hope. One day, they were blindfolded and feared the worst. Through the intercession

of the Italian government (their mother had an Italian passport), they were put on a plane and arrived in Paris. Eventually they made their way to the USA where they worked hard to build a life. It was very difficult. Their father had died at a very young age in Egypt, so they relied on their mother alone. All their papers and diplomas were left behind and when they came they struggled to find their way into the educational system. Dr. Irving Linn, who was Bram's English teacher, helped Albert with his English so that he could earn his American high school diploma; he had years before earned his French/Egyptian high school diploma. He also took many classes to learn more about Judaism.

The ensuing years were filled with studies and many tragedies. Albert's sister and brother died untimely deaths. Albert gave up everything else he was doing and concentrated on *hazzanut.* Bram had already retired and the Congregation had gone through a series of candidates. Albert was a well-liked young man in the community and was offered the position. At some time in this period, Albert made his first trip back to the Middle East. We traveled together to Israel and had a great time. We noticed how uncomfortable he was seeing so many Arabs, feeling the scars of his terrible last years in Egypt. Throughout the trip, everywhere we went, he and Bram practiced the Megillah, a task he had to master before returning.

Albert was much loved by many congregants. He had a warm, sweet way and a keen sense of people. After a while, without notifying him, the Synagogue hired someone else. This created an uproar. Petitions were circulated, people protested and strategized, but none of it led to his being rehired. Mikveh Israel, the famous Sephardic synagogue in Philadelphia, needed an assistant Rabbi. Albert was recommended to them even though he was not a rabbi; he knew the *minhag* better than their Ashkenazic rabbi so he was accepted. Eventually the Rabbi was fired and Albert got the leading position. Albert was embraced immediately, so much so that the

Congregation gave him leave to go to Israel to earn his *semikhah*. After Bram's retirement, Albert regularly invited him to do services on the High Holidays and opened his home to us often.



Phil Sherman took over from Albert and spent much time studying from the tapes that Bram had made and consulted with him regularly. Although currently not the full-time *hazzan* (he is a celebrity *mohel*), he continues to do beautiful services and is faithful to the *minhag*. Since Bram died, Phil comes over to my house every week to recite the *habdalah* for me.



Ira Rohde is currently the *hazzan*. A gifted musician with a gentle nature, Ira has mastered the *nusah*. He also has *semikhah* and an encyclopedic knowledge of many things. His rendering of the services has a heartfelt quality that reminds me of Bram. Ira has been a true friend and neighbor. When Bram wasn't well, he visited often and was always of help. Bram was particularly fond of his gifted son Baruch, his daughter Ruth Malka and his lovely wife Lisa.



More than ten years had passed from Bram's initial announcement of his retirement. When Bram became 70 years old he told the Trustees that he was very serious about retiring. It became

impossible because we never had time for ourselves, could never take off when we wanted, and had to arrange our vacations around other people's schedules, with others taking priority. We spoke to some of our friends who were acquainted with pension funds, and they advised us to get out. Our dear friend Morris Green looked over our situation, and told us to stand by our decision to retire; this was the best advice we would ever get.

Many times we met the Gersteins who complained bitterly about their situation. We encouraged them to retire as we were planning to do. They too deserved a few good years where they did not have to live such a stressful life. Too bad Amy did not enjoy her retirement for long as she took ill and eventually passed away. At a dinner we met Rabbi and Mrs. Reichel of the West Side Institutional Synagogue. They too were ready to retire from the rabbinate. We encouraged them to consider voluntary retirement while they were still young and healthy. Eventually, they came to the same conclusion and later shared how happy they were having joined our club.

Sephardic Songs of Praise

After Bram retired, Sid and Judy came up with a good idea. Bram should record important pieces of Sephardic *hazzanut* and put out accompanying books on the subject. We contacted our old friend Velvel Pasternack of Tara Publishing who was excited by the idea. Working together, we raised support for the recording and printing from several patrons and Bram's pupils. All of the family encouraged Bram to undertake this project. It took about a year to put things together. Our good friend, the late Jack Calderon, designed the covers. Judy, Sid and Debby edited the books together. I was always nudging them to hurry up and Velvel could not understand why they were such perfectionists. He called the girls "The Feinshmecker Sisters" (referring to their good taste and insistence on the highest

production values.) We were never sure whether that was a compliment or not.

In Dr. Pool's time, the Rudin family joined the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue. Jack Rudin, a major NY realtor and very important member of the synagogue board, offered to finance the first and second printing of the two-volume book. He was always encouraging Bram in his endeavors and was very attached to the synagogue. Any time we asked him to support one of Bram's projects, he was immediately forthcoming.

The launching of the book was a great success. After the first book, "Sephardic Songs of Praise" came a second book, "Selected Sephardic Chants." They came together with tapes and later with a CD. All these books were published under the Tara label, with the financial support of friends who donated the money. Even today the books and CDs are very much in demand.

Bram Takes a Fall

Bram and I were invited to Brooklyn to the home of Deborah Chabod, a good friend. She and her boyfriend picked us up and we went with them to her apartment. We had to climb two flights of stairs to get there; I went in front and Bram followed me. As I entered the apartment with the host and hostess, we heard a big bang and we saw that Bram was falling backwards. He was dressed in a heavy winter coat and hat, which protected him. He rolled down a complete flight of stairs and landed on the main landing. I was petrified. Hatzalah was called. When they came, the first thing Bram said was, "I am fine. I am a survivor. I am a survivor." These words so reflected all that Bram was about: his will to carry on as the sole survivor of his family; his love of life; and his strong determination to live till 120.

Bram was taken to Methodist Hospital in Brooklyn. After he was examined thoroughly, he was sent home. Nobody bothered to tell us that he had broken a few ribs. He was in agony and could not sleep in his bed. Instead, he spent night after night in the chair. Ultimately, he was so exhausted he had to be hospitalized. It was then that we learned that he had broken ribs and had to practice deep breathing. Bram would only allow our son-in-law Earl to come and help him bathe, which Earl did with great pleasure. It took Bram, as well as myself, a long time to recover.

Knighthood

With the help of Salo Vaz Dias and many other of Bram's friends, a petition was presented to Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands nominating Bram for the title of "Knight in the Order of Orange Nassau." The nomination cited Bram's service during World War II, his preservation of the *nusah* as practiced for hundreds of years in Amsterdam and his loyal and proud representation of the Dutch Jewish heritage.

During the war years in Suriname, Bram worked for the Dutch government but served as Chaplain for Dutch and American servicemen. Many refugees came to Suriname from Holland and Belgium, including a large group that landed by ship and were put in quarantine. Bram served as their spokesman and secured their release. The community embraced them, took them into our homes and helped them establish themselves. Because of Bram's outstanding service on behalf of the Dutch people and the Dutch Government, in the year 2000 Queen Beatrix bestowed upon Bram the title of "Knight in the Order of Orange Nassau."



Bram deserved this honor, not only for what he did, but also for the person he was. He never looked for honor or recognition. Mr. Bob Heinsch, Consul General of New York for the Netherlands, was chosen by the Queen to bestow this honor upon Bram. He is a very fine and lovely man; we became very well acquainted with him and are good friends. (Bob Heinsch was appointed Ambassador of the Netherlands to Israel beginning August 15, 2003, served as head of the EU when it was Holland's turn under the rotation system and is now Dutch Ambassador to India.) Mr. Heinsch was very enthusiastic when he visited us at our home and mentioned to us that he decided to take matters into his own hands. He arranged a glatt kosher cocktail party for us in the offices of the Dutch Consulate. He invited, with the help of Arnie Goldfarb, about sixty of our friends. Many more people showed up. It was a great success and a lot of fun.

At the ceremony, Bram spoke very powerfully and movingly about his gratitude to G-d and about what Hitler did to his parents and the entire Jewish community in Holland. He referred to the Biblical blessing Jacob gave his grandsons referring as he always did to the *"HaMalakh HaGoel Oti,"* "The angel that saved me." Bram was so grateful to have survived but always reminded everyone of the unforgettable crime that Hitler and his cohorts committed. Bram was never afraid to speak out and people respected him for that. The room was crowded. Everyone was standing when he spoke, and his speech got a rousing ovation.

On the first day of Shabuot, June 9, 2000, a special luncheon was held in the synagogue in honor of Bram's knighthood. More than three hundred people paid for their participation in advance and many others stayed outside sitting in the hallway. It was a wonderful *seudah*. People who we have not seen for a long time and the few friends Bram still knew from Holland came to do Bram honor. Jaap Polak, who knew Bram from childhood, spoke very movingly. The

Consul General didn't have enough words to impress upon us his sincere thanks and admiration for our family. Until his final days, Bram talked about this happy event. Bram gave such a touching speech; many people could not hold back their tears. Bram wore his insignia *lintje* with much pride. Even in death, his Dutch identity accompanied him: his coffin was draped with the *tallit* of Haham Pereira, his late teacher; on top of that I placed his *lintje*. Holland is still in our hearts, and although much happened that was unforgiveable, Bram never showed bitterness. He accepted G-d's will and remembered the good.

Musical Homecoming

The phone rang. It was someone we never heard of, a Barry Mehler, calling from Holland. Barry asked for Bram. When Bram came on the phone, Barry sang him several bars of music and stopped. Bram completed the line of music. His face turned white, and the usually gentle Bram demanded: "Who are you?!" Barry introduced himself as an expert on German *"Chazzonus."* He explained that he was hired by the *esnoga* in Amsterdam to catalogue their archives. While rummaging through, he found a sheet of music written for choir that had not been sung since before the war. That is the music Barry sang to Bram and Bram sang back to Barry. Bram, at this point, was the only person alive who remembered this music being sung.

Barry came to New York to meet us and a wonderful friendship developed. It was a bond sealed by a deep love of Jewish liturgy. From this meeting an idea was born: For Bram's 90th birthday, Bram would join a performance of the revived adult choir, the Santo Servicio. At this concert, the re-discovered piece of music would be sung, along with other pieces written for the choir.

Bram injected another idea. Before leaving for Suriname, Bram had meticulously copied over the entire Amsterdam *Hazzanim* Handbook. Each morning after *shacharit* he would copy an additional page. This was most fortuitous as the book, like so much else, was destroyed by the Nazis. Bram thought it would be a wonderful idea to present this book as a gift to the Santo Servicio. The concert was an incredible success. The choir sang the traditional *"Baruch Haba"* and Bram walked in, hobbling a bit but fiercely determined and radiantly happy. The evening consisted of his recollections both historical and musical. The program was filmed by Dutch TV and has been replayed many times over.

CD: Music of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam

A few years before his death, Bram worked with Dr. Edwin Seroussi of the Music Department of the Hebrew University to produce a booklet and CD of old Spanish and Portuguese melodies from Holland called "The Western Sephardi Liturgical Tradition." This project was funded by the Edmond J. Safra Foundation, along with Mr. Jack Rudin, Mrs. Manfred Sondheimer, Mr. Norris D. Wolff, Mr. Ronald Stanton and Angel and Frankel, P.C. This is actually the most valuable of all Bram's works from a historical and musicological point of view. The core recordings were made by Bram in the 1960s, under the sponsorship of Mr. Jacob Michael, a noted philanthropist. The recording equipment was amazing and the quality of sound unparalleled. The recordings were a part of Jacob Michael's Estate and were transferred to Hebrew University, where Professor Edwin Seroussi discovered them. Dr. Seroussi invited Bram to come and complete the recordings, filling in important pieces that were

not part of the original collection. It is fascinating to listen and compare Bram's voice decades apart—from when he was a man in his 40's to when he was in his 90's. Judy had the privilege of accompanying Bram to his later recordings. Bram was so happy that Judy and her family had moved to Israel, and that Judy, very well-versed in the music, was accompanying him. As always, his work gave him such joy.

12

Building for the Future

To paraphrase Pirkei Abot – "Al Tikreh Banayikh, Ela Bonayikh"—our children are not simply our "sons," they are builders of the future. Bram and I were committed to educating the next generation. I worked for many educational institutions and Bram was the teacher of many children. Without exception, all his bar mitzvah boys considered him their lifelong friend and mentor. He was kind but firm in his standards. Our home was regularly visited by bar mitzvah boys and we women often learned their Torah portions by heart after hearing them repeated again and again.

Bram was a born teacher. He began teaching as a teenager in Amsterdam where he became a much respected youth leader and role model. It was a time of great assimilation, but Bram made being Jewish something exciting and worthwhile. I experienced Bram's special gift as a teacher from his years in Suriname. Later, I watched how he taught our children and grandchildren in his patient and calm way. He had the ability to reduce complex ideas into simple concepts and to find perfect exercises to build skills.

"Today I am a Fountain Pen"

By the time Bram had served the Congregation for more than 57 years, he had taught more than 400 boys their bar mitzvah portions. Some of them were very easy to teach, but some of them were tough. Bram had an almost encyclopedic recollection of each boy and his usual errors in his Torah portion. He taught many boys, ranging from children of privilege such as William Kristol, today a noted Conservative columnist, to children of new immigrants. Some of the parents were more problematic than the kids. Bram was once teaching a boy who was nice but had difficulties learning. He rarely studied and often would skip lessons without calling. The next time he showed up he handed Bram what looked like a piece of toilet paper on which was written: "If my son doesn't want to say the *haftarah* he doesn't have to."

Bram liked the joke of the bar mitzvah boy who stands up to give his speech and instead of saying "Today I am a man," says "Today I am a fountain pen" (referring to the classic American bar mitzvah gift of the 50s and 60s). While the parents of the boy often had their minds on the trimmings—the gifts, the party, the clothes—all Bram's students, even those who began the learning process reluctantly, found great satisfaction in meeting Bram's standards and reading well on their bar mitzvah day. The connection between Bram and his boys remained strong throughout the years.

We attended all the bar mitzvah parties on the condition that they be under strict Rabbinical supervision. He made it a policy to attend a Shabbat luncheon only if our children were invited as well. Bram sometimes lamented that some celebrations were more *"bar"* than *"Mitzvah."* The *kashrut* of the food didn't necessarily immunize him from events where the guest entertainers were belly dancers!

Sometimes bar mitzvah boys came not only with parents in tow but also with pets. Billy Hyman came to the house with his large black poodle Louis. My husband told him that dogs weren't allowed in the synagogue; they left him at our house while they practiced from the *sefer* in the synagogue. Not five minutes had passed before Louis found the kitchen and the meat loaf I had prepared for supper that night.



Bram especially enjoyed teaching gifted and motivated students. There were some very excellent students who learned the *nusah* with great enthusiasm: Charles Gourgey, Johnny Herlands, Roy Stern, David Abraham, Seth Haberman, Richard Schultz, Jonathan Kaye and Avery Neumark, to name just a few. All these boys either were self-educated or had received good Jewish educations and were fully immersed in Jewish ways. Many adults from the community came to learn to read their *haftarot* or their Torah portions. Even our son-in-law Sid, a dyed-in-the-wool Ashkenazi, quickly learned the *nusah* from Bram and was able to chant any haftarah. Daniel Halfon was a particular pleasure because of his knowledge of the London Spanish and Portuguese tradition and his uncanny ability to imitate anything and anybody.

A Special Student

Charles Gourgey came to Hebrew School at the Synagogue and very soon Bram noticed that even though he had very poor eyesight, he was extremely musical. Bram worked with him for a very long time and taught him all the *hazzanut* from the Spanish Portuguese Synagogue. His family was from Iraq and they soon joined the Congregation.

After a while he met and married a lovely and capable girl. They lived in Queens and everything was going well for them. One Saturday evening she was walking home alone and a man approached her. He asked for money but she had none on her; he pulled out a knife and killed her. The super of her building saw what happened and went to call her husband. Sunday morning at 5 o'clock our telephone rang. I jumped up and heard some people screaming on the other end of the line: it was their family informing us of the terrible news. My cousin Bep Samson was staying with us. We all went immediately to 86th Street where Charles' parents lived. They had no idea what to do, so we took care of all the arrangements. The body was going to Cleveland where her family lived.

Charles begged Bram go with him to Cleveland and stay with him through *shivah*. After some discussion Bram agreed to go and was very gratified to be able to help such a worthy young man in such a difficult time. Bram was never a morbid person and was a perfect antidote for people in times of need. His matter-of-fact approach to complex situations and pleasant demeanor were appreciated by everybody who knew him. Truth to tell, for me this was sometimes exasperating. He often proceeded to distract himself with mundane matters when I would present him with bad or sad news. Sometimes, when there was any disagreement at home, he would sit down at the piano and wage his war through music! After a few years, Charles got remarried to a lovely blind woman with a seeing-eye dog. Both of them are teaching music and psychology and the marriage is an excellent one. Charles comes back to the synagogue on occasion and reads the most beautiful *haftarah*. All the nuances in his reading reflect Bram's teaching and Charles' understanding of the text and music.

A Most Devoted Pupil

Of all Bram's students, the one who has been most outstanding in his devotion to the synagogue, the *minhag* and Bram's legacy is Mark Aron. The son of esteemed members Arthur and Carol Goldberg, Mark approached Bram in the late 1990's to film him in the synagogue and discuss the *minhag*. A talented videographer, Mark taped Bram's funeral, each of the *meldaduras* and is working on a video of Bram's life. It will include the story of his life and focus on his teaching and his *hazzanut*. Of course, Shearith Israel will be the heart of the video.

Mark is passionate about preserving the *minhag* and not instituting changes. He is never afraid to speak his mind, undeterred in his determination to see that Shearith Israel maintain the beauty and grandeur of its glorious tradition. When I think about how it is that Shearith Israel has remained the same since 1654—despite major reforming forces—I think of young people like Mark who truly love the service and are devoted to its continuation.

13

Israel—Our True Home

For Bram and I, Israel felt more like home than anywhere in the world, including Holland. So many of our friends from around the world had settled there. We loved the holiness and Jewish atmosphere. The warm hospitality of friends and family only added to Israel's homeyness. Charlie and Els Bendheim's gracious hospitality gave us a wonderful home base, and made it financially feasible for us to stay for long periods at a time.

At all times, Bram was planning our next trip to Israel. We spent many unforgettable partial summers in Jerusalem when Bram was working. Later when he retired, it was his greatest joy to go to Israel for the holidays. He often did services at Hayad LeRav Nissim. We toyed many times with the idea of living there, especially after Judy and her family made *aliyah*. But in the end, both of us felt we were too old and too connected to Shearith Israel to make such a radical move.

Israel was always very close to my heart. The Suriname community where I was raised was for the most part Zionistic. Later on, when

I lived in New York, I was one of the thousands of people dancing in front of the U.N. when Israel was declared a State in 1948. Even before I set foot in Israel, I had worked to raise money for secondary education there. People today do not remember the fact that it is only relatively recently that high school education in Israel is free. For many years, the government could not subsidize high school education because of its enormous defense budget and thus, many poor Israelis, many of them Sephardim, could not afford to give their children a high school education.



Bram visited Israel in August, 1948, as a chaperone for Herman Salomon and Joel Schneirson. It made a great impression upon him. Mrs. Tamar de Sola Pool was there at the time and toured with them. My first trip to Israel was with Bram and the girls in 1966. Two years later, in 1968, the Recanati family invited us to Israel. Bram was teaching Michael Recanati for his summer bar mitzvah. We were put up in Herzliya in a lovely motel and Michael visited daily for lessons and a little relaxation. The post-Six Day War euphoria was to be felt everywhere and we reveled in every moment. When we were in Jerusalem, we spent a Shabbat sleeping on the floor of a friends' house in the Old City in order to be able to pray at the *kotel* for Shabbat.

The Werblowsky Family

On our first trip to Israel in 1966, Prof. Zvi Werblowsky took us around the country. I remember standing at Abu Tor looking longingly at the Old City not dreaming that in the next year, a great miracle would occur and Jerusalem would be united. Zvi and Aliza

opened their home in Beit Hakerem to us and their children were most delightful. Aliza was a remarkable woman in her own right; she who was the first Israeli to swim the English Channel.

We had met Zvi in the Palache home in Amsterdam. He and Leo lived in the same house after the war. Zvi was enamored of all things Spanish and Portuguese and sang all the melodies. He made many tapes of Sephardic music from the Baroque era that he shared with Bram. Zvi went on to become a Professor of Comparative Religion and Dean of Humanities at Hebrew University. He traveled extensively to the Far East and conducted negotiations for the Israeli government with the Vatican.

The Rehovot Cardozos

On our first trip in 1966, we went to visit the Jessurun Cardozo Family. Bram remembered "Ies" (short for Issac) from Holland and had stayed with them in Curacao on his way to New York from Suriname. Like Bram, Ies had been sent to Curacao by the Dutch government to serve as the community's rabbi; his life, too, was saved as a result. In Rehovot where he had settled, his family organized annual Rosh Hashanah and Kippur services according to the Amsterdam *nusah* with their relatives the Hammelbergs who lived close by. It was wonderful to see a Dutch family who had become Israelis. We shared a love of the *nusah* and music and became especially close to their daughter Esther Gal who was a music teacher.

The Gal's son Yonatan was a beloved *hesder* student of Rav Simcha Hakohen Kook in Rehovot. In 1973, he was assigned to serve as *hazzan* on Rosh Hashanah for troops stationed on the Suez Canal. They enjoyed his services so much that they asked that he come for Yom Kippur. He was not obligated to do so but did it out of

love for these soldiers. On that fateful day, his bunker, along with many others, was invaded by the Egyptians. The boys who were not killed were taken prisoner to Egypt. It was an agonizing period for the Cardozo-Gal family as there was no trace of Yoni. When the prisoners of war returned, one of them recounted how Yoni went from wounded boy to wounded boy to say *"Shema"* with them before they died. Yoni died in the bunker along with them, on Yom Kippur, *"al Kiddush Hashem."*

I have been blessed in my life to witness glimpses of the Divine plan. One summer we were in Israel when we were called at two o'clock in the morning that Ies had died. Before his death, he had asked that in the event of his death, Bram should come and lead the *hakafot.* It was as if he knew that Bram would be close when the time came and not thousands of miles away in New York. And so it was. The chief rabbi of Rishon LeZion, our friend Rabbi Azran, rendezvoused with us in Rehovot and together with Bram, conducted a Sephardic funeral complete with the Spanish and Portuguese *hakafot.*

Esther Gal's brother Sam has lived in a special group home in Jerusalem for many years. When Bram and I visited Israel last, we made a point of spending time with him. We sang Dutch Sephardic melodies together and according to Esther, he was happier than he had been in years.

The Gokkes Family

Dan Gokkes (*"Chukkat"* as he called himself in Israel) was Lea a'Cattan Palache's first cousin. He was an orphan who lived in the community-sponsored orphanage. Bram would recount how at funerals all the orphan boys with their little caps escorted the hearse from the synagogue. Their reward was an invitation to partake in the *seudat habra'ah*—smoked salmon and cheeses that were not part

of the regular fare in the orphanage. Sala, Dan's wife, had also been an orphan who grew up in Rotterdam.

Dan and Sala settled in Israel and established a printing press in Haifa after the war. Leo Palache purchased some tools for Dan's machinery that we carried with us to Israel on one of our visits. When Dan came to meet us, he in his characteristic dramatic and funny way said: "Bram, I'm never going to learn this language!" From then on we became very close, with almost daily contact when we were in Israel. They moved from Haifa to Bnai Brak with their very growing family where we visited on many occasions for week-ends. It was a very close friendship and Bram and Dan reminisced about old times in Amsterdam. Dan was a highly creative person who wrote several scholarly books, a Dutch-Hebrew dictionary, a book about his life and invented many interesting apparatuses.

Of all the families I have known in my life, I never saw such a deeply religious one, where every event—good and bad—was greeted with faith in G-d and optimism. Their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren walk in their path.

There were many times in my life with Bram that it felt like some special person in our lives "waited" for us to arrive in order to die. And so it was. It was a year after Bram's death and I was visiting with Judy in Israel when Dan passed away. I had the privilege to attend his funeral. Sala's cousin Rabbi Brotman gave the most beautiful eulogy wherein he addressed the funeral chapel filled to capacity with their many children and grandchildren: "Both of you began your journey as orphans. Now look what you established—the Tribe of Dan."

The Lopes Cardozos

It was a momentous day when we met Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo and his lovely wife Freyda. It is hard to pinpoint the exact day we became aware of each other's existence, but Rabbi Nathan (whom we call "Nico," his Dutch nickname) recalls delivering a lecture in NY, when someone gave him a note. It said: "Your cousin is here to see you." Not being aware of having any cousins, he went outside. We all met—and the rest is history. He is Bram's second cousin; they share the same illustrious ancestor, the former Haham David Lopes Cardozo (1808-1890), after whom he named his academy. They are not only relatives but dear and close friends, Rabbi Nathan is very well-respected internationally for his work in the David Cardozo Academy, his books and many lectures. Wherever we go and whomever we meet, Nathan Cardozo's gentle and loving manner together with his erudition has given him a golden name. He works hard to represent a tolerant Sephardic perspective in the Orthodox world. We see and speak to each other very often.

Ezra Gorodesky

Ezra Gorodesky is a beloved friend who we have known for many years. We know Ezra from his many travels and involvement with artifacts. Our friendship with him has grown over the years. Whenever he was in New York, he stayed at our home, always leaving his room spotless. He has contributed part of his book and manuscript collection to the National Jewish Library of the Hebrew University. He still has many fascinating books and artifacts that he has collected over the years. He not only loves to drink tea, but he has an impressive collection of teapots and tea paraphernalia. Whenever we were in Jerusalem, Ezra was our very first visitor. Even when we would arrive early in the morning, Ezra would be there. He would come practically every day

for his cup of tea and all kinds of philosophical conversations about Judaism. He is the *shamash* of a Sephardic Synagogue in the Old City and is very proud of being a *kohen*.

His sense of fun is contagious and many amusing things happened to him. Ezra once had a small dog named Finkelstein, whom he adored. After suffering a mild heart attack Ezra returned home from the hospital. Awaiting him was his little dog "Finkelstein". One afternoon, the telephone rang when he was not home. Little Finkelstein knocked the receiver off the hook and barked a few times. The friend on the other end of the phone thought that Ezra had become sick again and sent an ambulance. When Ezra came home later that day, he could not believe what little Finkelstein had done.

The Simmons

Vida Simmons' father, Rev. Corcos, was the *hazzan* at the Spanish & Portuguese synagogue for a short time. Vida met Fred Simmons at the Young People's Group in the synagogue. Fred's family came from Rotterdam and lived in the Oliver Cromwell on 72nd Street. The young couple moved to Israel shortly after their marriage. At this time, this was a highly unusual thing to do and characterized their idealism and enthusiasm. These were hard times and their successes were hard earned. We kept in touch with them and rejoiced with them when their children were born and matured into fine citizens of Israel. We visited them every time we were in Israel. I worked with Vida on the Sisterhood project Dalton, a moshav in the North of Israel. In the 1950s a group of Moroccan Jewish refugees arrived from the Atlas Mountains. They did not know anything of the modern world. For fifty years, Vida devoted time, patience and love to help these people adjust. She went often to Dalton to see with her own eyes the progress that they were making. She did

this work with the help and financial assistance of our Sisterhood and many times of herself. The first thing this community requested was a *mikveh*. Mrs. Simmons, Fred's mother, donated the funds for the ritual bath, so these people could truly feel at home. Vida is a highly practical person who does beautiful needlework and embroidery. She wrote a wonderful little book called "Vida's Hints."

The Zamirs

Eva Zamir was Dr. Pool's secretary. She was quick-witted, lively and always upbeat. Her husband Misha was our role-model of an Israeli pioneer, always trim and fit with a wonderful mustache. Misha spoke many languages and loved music, which gave him much in common with our family. Eva and Misha met on a boat to Israel; Eva earned her passage by playing the piano. Misha was born in Russia. Zev Jabotinsky, the founder of Zionist Revisionism and early leader of the Irgun, was his godfather. He fought with the partisans in Poland and suffered terribly in Mengele's hands in concentration camp. When he was liberated he went to France and later Israel, where he fought in the War of Independence. Eva, too, was a part of the birth of the State. She worked for Hadassah Hospital, and traveled undercover by ambulance to and from Mt. Scopus during the war. They were married by the "Tzaddik of Jerusalem," Rabbi Aryeh Levin.

The Zamirs had no children and in many ways treated our girls as their nieces. Misha escorted them to many concerts; they had a wonderful time. Eva and Misha scrimped and saved to fulfill their lifelong dream of returning to Israel on *aliyah*. First they moved to Kiryat Moshe, where they had a large beautiful apartment with the delicious smells of bread from the neighboring Angel Bakery wafting in. They were miserable there; they felt isolated from the hub of the city and all of their friends. So they traded the expansive

apartment for a small one on Rehov Lincoln, several feet away from the King David Hotel and Keren Kayemet.

They loved living in Israel and we loved visiting them. They were like family to Debby when she spent a year in Israel in 1970. Our visits to their home and the outings that they took us on were always special. One summer, Misha took the girls to a Master Class in the Khan given by Pablo Casals for gifted, newly-arrived musicians from the former Soviet Union. It was a magical event. All my children and grandchildren fell in love with Misha and Eva. They were full of life and love, passionate about Israel, the Jewish people, music, books and politics.

Eva and Misha worked many different jobs and filled their lives with many volunteer activities. Misha loved serving as a volunteer policeman at night; Eva until well into her 90's volunteered in various hospitals as a music therapist. Misha became very ill and predeceased Eva. A romantic, Misha before his death ordered flowers for Eva for her birthday. Eva managed on her own until she could no longer. She moved to an adult care facility in Ra'anana, near her brother—the same facility Vida and Freddy Simmons are in. Until her last few months, she continued to volunteer and went swimming every day. When she died, the facility did not even notify the Simmons.

The Bendheims

All our later trips to Israel, frugally planned with the help of our travel agents Mr. Elbaum and then Mr. Abadi and Anke Vega, were made possible by the unlimited hospitality of the Bendheim family. One year, Charlie let us stay for four weeks in one of the apartments he then owned in the Plaza Hotel. Later, we stayed in their adjoining apartment in Gan Rehavia and enjoyed Els and Charlie's

company and the warmth and assistance of staff members Yechiel, Rachel, Esther and Bernice. When Charlie passed away, Els continued to encourage us to spend time with her. We are very happy to be with Els and share in her life. Every morning we had the pleasure of eating breakfast with her and when she returned from a full day of activities, she and I would talk until late.

Each year Els has a *succah* built to accommodate all her guests; the festivities are quite amazing. She always wants us to bring as many guests as we want to and every year the *succah* gets bigger and better. Every year, a service of family and friends is held inside the *succah* for Simhat Torah. When the *tikkun haGeshem* is read, the grandchildren (and great-grandchildren) go up to Judy and Harris Guedalia's apartment on the second floor and throw down cups full of water.

Rabbi Azran

Rabbi Yossef Azran in 1964 was the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Kiryat Malachi (an Israeli development town named after its twin city, Los Angeles.) His wife Giselle gave birth to an infant with severe nephritis; there was nothing the doctors could do for the baby. Hearing that Albert Einstein College of Medicine had pioneered a treatment for infants with kidney disease, he emptied his bank account and on Tisha B'Ab flew to NY with the baby and brought her to Einstein. The hospital agreed to treat the baby for nothing. Moved by his devotion, medical students and interns let Rabbi Azran sleep in their dorms and shared meal tickets with him.

In need of respite, Rabbi Azran heard there was a Cardozo family where he would find a listening ear, Sephardic warmth and hospitality. He visited, and we fell in love with this dazzling *neshamah*. As soon as the baby's condition stabilized somewhat, he became a

ben bayit (member of the household.) He stayed for many weeks and eventually took the baby home. Sadly, the baby passed away soon after.

The amazing part of the story was that Rabbi Azran was only twenty four years old when we met him. He had already directed an educational institute in his native Morocco as well as a boarding school in Strasbourg, France, and had risen to the post of Chief Rabbi of Kiryat Malachi. Rabbi Azran went on to become a member of the 12th and 13th Knesset as a member of Shas; head of the Netivot Chaim Educational Institutes of Kiryat Malachi and Bnai Brak; Rosh Yeshiva in Sderot and Chief Rabbi of Rishon LeZion. Many years later we learned that he was a genius who become bar mitzvah before the age of thirteen, an accepted custom in Morocco for exceptionally bright and committed boys. A humble person, Rabbi Azran never forgot our hospitality and reciprocated tenfold when we were in Israel.

Rabbi Azran was a *talmid chacham* and communal leader, whose impact was felt not only in Israel but on the world stage. He was one of the key figures in "Rabbis and Imams for Peace," a remarkable gathering of two hundred leading rabbis, Moslem and Christian clergy in 2005 held in Egmont Palace in Paris. What brought them together in a moment never to be repeated was the tsunami—a cataclysmic act of G-d. The following is taken from a report on the event:

"...Then Zimer Omar Frouk Turan, the former mufti of Istanbul, recited verses from the Koran. No sooner did he finish than Rabbi Yossef Azran...chanted a psalm, his voice choked with tears. When the moments of silence [for the victims of the tsunami] were over, the hundreds of clergy in the room remained standing. Some wiped away a tear. "This proves that rabbis and imams can work together for a common goal," said Rabbi Rene Sirat, former chief rabbi of France. "In all my

years as a rabbi, I never experienced a moment like this," Sirat added, invoking the traditional blessing of reaching a special milestone."

As I write these words I have learned of the passing of my dear Rabbi Azran, in Paris, as they attempted a liver transplant. I was heartbroken to learn that within the year his wife Giselle as well as a son had predeceased him. A true religious leader, Rabbi Azran was a beautiful soul and cherished friend. May he, his wife and his departed children rest in peace, and may G-d comfort his remaining family on their great loss.



The Cohens and the Soloways

Some of the young people in New York with whom we were close eventually set down roots in Israel. Margie and Steven Cohen were a dynamic couple who spent many *Shabbatot* around our table. With the birth of their son Aryeh, they decided to make Israel their home. Likewise Bill Soloway, an architect who attended our Synagogue on a regular basis and became very fond of us. When he decided to marry a lovely English professor Anita, a classmate and friend of Giti Bendheim, he brought her to meet us. They came to ask Bram and I to stand as their parents at their forthcoming wedding. We were very honored. With her extended family from Bnei Brak and many friends from far and wide, it was a beautiful and dignified affair and Bram and I marched in with the couple with burning candles in our hands. Both the Cohens and the Soloways moved to Ra'anana.

From Paramaribo to Jerusalem

Many years ago, the Israel Museum became interested in bringing the historic Zedek ve-Shalom synagogue from Paramaribo for permanent installation. A committee was formed and money was raised for this big project that included dismantling the synagogue, piece by piece, and reconstructing it in Israel. My nephew, Dr. Reuben del Prado, played a leading role in the Suriname side. Michael and Judith Steinhardt took a great interest in this project. It took several years before the pieces acclimated to the Israeli climate. In July 2010, the Suriname exhibit and synagogue will be open to the public. It is heartening to know that the history of this wonderful community will finally be known. Still it is sad to think of this synagogue as an artifact and not a living institution. The remaining community in Suriname is struggling to keep the traditions going. When services are conducted, they are held in the Ashkenazic synagogue.

A very special part of our visits to Israel are our connections to individuals who made it from my birthplace, Paramaribo all the way to Israel. Each of them is remarkable with a very special story to tell.

My daughter Judy and her husband Sid—the Cardozo family in Israel—have opened up their home and hearts to many of these individuals, including Melanie Robles, a granddaughter of my father's half sister Netjie.

We are close to my cousin Tillie (de Vries Robles) Berman who married a *talmid chacham* and has raised a beautiful family in Yerushalayim. Bram and I have a special connection with Dr. Bueno de Mesquita—Bram was his *mohel* in Suriname. Dr. Mesquita today is a well-known naturopath who lives in Ramot. Many of our friends are his patients, including Daniel Halfon and others. He is so gifted that it is hard to get an appointment with him. He is a true healer, a very spiritual and

intelligent man who is well versed in many healing arts. It is always a pleasure to visit him and his lovely wife.

Israel has been a place of Jewish discovery and connection for many members of my family. My sister Dorine sent her daughter to study at Tel Aviv University, where she met her most wonderful husband Yaakov. Although they moved to Suriname and later the United States, all three of their children have married Israelis. Most recently, Jules and Carla's son Guido married a warm and special Israeli girl in the Istambuli Synagogue, one of the four special synagogues in the Old City of Jerusalem. Guido has for years served as the head of the Jodensavanne preservation committee. I cannot help but imagine that my parents were looking down with great joy at this union.

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Grieving

When Bram fell on the corner of 70th Street in March 2005, I never could have imagined that it was the beginning of the end. He was taken to Lenox Hill Hospital where he was operated on for a broken hip which the doctor told me was successfully repaired. He shared a room with a lovely man who was recovering from a kidney transplant. He was very fond of "Opa" and was especially taken with the Satmar women who came like angels of mercy on a daily basis with homemade chicken soup. He asked that I bring him a *kippah* from home so that he, too, could partake of this incredible liquid antibiotic. His good spirit helped Bram's recovery.

This was a difficult period for me as well. Other than for a minor outpatient procedure, Bram had never been hospitalized. For almost 55 years we were constant companions and with him out of commission, I was very disoriented. It was terrible to wake up in the morning without him there—listening to the radio, commenting on something from the newspaper even though I was trying to get in a bit more sleep, and working at his desk. I was running back and

forth from the hospital and felt so lost coming back to an empty apartment. I didn't have time to cook and would eat half of Bram's supper.

Bram was found to be very anemic and it was discovered that he had stomach bleeding due to the blood thinners they had given him post-op and years of osteoporosis medication. He was given blood transfusions and was finally well enough to go to rehabilitation at Mt. Sinai Hospital. Through it all, he was upbeat and courageous. Every day at Mount Sinai he had group and individual exercises that thoroughly exhausted him. To all the staff, he was simply "Abraham" and he took everything (including doing group exercises to the song "Y---MCA") in stride. He came home after three weeks with a nurse coming a few hours per day. We had to rearrange our room and separate our beds so that he could use his walker to go to the bathroom. He was not happy about people rearranging his environment, but he had no choice. Aviva Sussman lent us a reclining chair that he adored. He went for physical therapy that was extremely taxing for him, but Bram always had a good attitude. Months later when we went to the surgeon, he x-rayed the hip and saw that a few screws moved around. Bram made a joke of it—that he "had a few screws loose." The doctor thought he needed a hip replacement but did not advise him to do it.



All through this period, Bram had his heart set on going to Israel. Not a year had passed without at least one trip to his beloved Eretz Yisrael. He never gave up on this idea. More and more we could see that he was failing. All the things he did on his own—from making his morning coffee, "washing" his shirts, running errands, doing the bookkeeping and bill paying, suddenly were out of his reach.

It was very hard for him and I simply could not do what needed to be done, for him and for the household. It came to a point that we needed 24-hour help in the house. I could not sustain his care any longer. We had a series of helpers supplied through Medicare, but one was stranger than the next. It was a real eye-opener to meet the people who are in the health aide services. We were finally given the name of a very good practical nurse—Esther-- who walked in and immediately won us over. She was strong, lively and capable and gave Bram a lot of encouragement and care. As often happens in these situations, Esther took charge of the household, pushed me to the side and treated me disrespectfully. For the sake of Bram, who enjoyed her good spirits and was comfortable with her, I held my tongue. She refused to eat my food and every night insisted I give her money to go out to eat. Her husband was a lovely man who called Bram every day to speak about the Bible. On the weekends, Esther went home and we hired Janice—who had been Debby's children's babysitter and now was our great-grandson Nathan's, to help.



One morning, Bram had an appointment with Dr. Bos, a Dutch lung specialist, because Dr. Yatrakis suspected that a cough that he had developed was asthmatic in nature. I was in the process of getting dressed to go along to the appointment, but before I knew it, Esther and Bram were out the door. I was very upset. When they returned I asked Bram whether Dr. Bos had asked for me. Esther answered—"Why would he ask for YOU?" I replied, fuming: "Because I'm his wife." After a few days, Esther showed me that Bram's hands and feet were swollen. We called Dr. Yatrakis and he told me to take him to the hospital immediately. Hatzalah, G-d bless them, came within minutes of my call and we took him

to Lenox Hill Hospital. Bram insisted on taking his coat with him because he planned on coming home later in the day. He told me to call his young bat-mitzvah student and re-schedule their lesson for 12 on the coming Sunday.

Dr. Yatrakis was in Greece and put Bram in the care of the house staff. When Bram went into the emergency room, Esther went with him and I was left sitting outside. Debby arrived and Esther went out to lunch. Bram told Debby that if Mommy really wants to get rid of Esther, he would be agreeable. I appreciated that he noticed how poorly she treated me, but I dared not make any changes in his care.

Debby spent the night with him. The hospital was on such short supply they did not even have a blanket to cover him with; Debby gave him her coat. That morning Bram—his usual chipper self—was sent down for an echocardiogram. Waiting for the test, Opa and Debby shared some dried cherries, which Bram especially loved. "Too bad Israel is out," he told Debby. "But we can go to Maddi and Bob." He loved *seder* at the Friedbauers, which so resembled the *sedarim* we had in our home. The table was filled with all kinds of people—Russian immigrants, *baalei teshubah*, anyone who needed a place—and the atmosphere was warm and inviting. The echocardiogram came back fine; the problem was not his heart. Bram had been living for years with 10% kidney function; it was now clear that his kidneys were failing.

In the meantime, my son-in-law Sid came to visit us in NYC. This was meant to be a cheer-Oma-up trip but ended up being something very different. He was staying with the Kayes in 101 CPW. On Shabbat, Bram had his first dialysis treatment. Despite his weakness, Bram and Sid spent an unforgettable day together—doing the entire Shabbat service, telling jokes and talking.

On Sunday of Washington's Birthday weekend, we arranged for many people to visit. Yossi, Deena and Nathan, came as well as the Genouns. Debby, having a sense that Opa's condition was fragile,

called Earl, Yitzi and Chantzie to come. While Debby and I were sitting talking to Bram, he suddenly began to lose consciousness. Debby ran for help. Doctors and nurses descended upon him and helped to revive him. When they asked him what he felt, he said with almost boyish simplicity "I felt nothing!" The dialysis had destabilized him; they decided he needed to be carefully monitored and so moved him to the Intensive Care Unit. On Monday, Sid and I spent time with him. We wanted to stay longer, but they were going to put in a dialysis line in his neck and we were not allowed to stay for this bedside surgical procedure. I wasn't quite ready to leave but wasn't given a choice. Before leaving, we went to his bed. Sid joked with him and said: "You're always give me the blessing. Now I'm going to give you the blessing." And he blessed him ending it with Opa's signature line "and double your salary!" Then Bram stared at me and said, " Irma darling, I love you very much." This was not his usual manner of talking, but his declaration warmed my heart. And we left.



Esther was with him for the night, I went home and Sid slept at the Kayes. At 2 p.m. I heard noise outside my apartment. I got nervous that someone was trying to break in, knowing that I was alone. I came to the door and I heard Sid and Esther's voices. I opened the door and said "Oh my G-d. Bram is dead." Esther had taken a cab to the Kaye's house to tell Sid the news and to accompany him to my house.

Apparently, before doing the procedure, Bram said his prayers at 11 p.m. In typical Bram fashion, he didn't have patience to wait any longer for the doctor. When they finally came, they asked Esther to sit outside. Before she knew it, the nurse came out, removing her gloves. Esther

asked "Are you finished?" and was told that Bram just died of a massive heart attack. She was stunned.

Immediately, despite my shock, I called my daughter Debby. She called my grandson Yossi who rushed to the hospital to stay with the body. Amidst all the feelings, the sadness, the suddenness, I was nonetheless able to think very clearly. Judy was called and I got the ball rolling on the funeral. We had to decide very quickly whether or not to bury him in his beloved Holy Land. Bram and I had written a clear *tzava'ah*, which stated that we would both be buried in the place where the one who had passed away first had died. We were leaving the decision as to where to be buried, in New York or Israel, up to G-d. Despite this, we were not sure what to do. After the morning service, the news spread like wildfire. Rabbi Angel came over and we discussed what to do. He said that Bram worked for this community for all these years, let him be honored by the community whom he served so well.



Months before this, we had the foresight to write up all the wishes Bram had in the event of his death and to pre-pay our funerals. Bram wanted to be sure that the traditional *hakafot* would be done for him as they were no longer standard fare and were only performed on special request. We had also not been happy with the plot that the synagogue had assigned us. Our friend George Blumenthal had re-interred his parents in Israel and generously donated their plot, which was in a much nicer and more accessible section, to us for our use. I was so thankful that I had pressured Bram into putting this in writing because when that day did arrive it was much easier on everybody.

The funeral was scheduled for Wednesday, giving time for Judy and her boys to come. When she arrived, Judy remembered the box of *"orlot"* (foreskins) that Bram had collected for all the boys he had circumcised. There is an ancient custom that a *mohel* should be buried with these. The Pereira children came with the *tallit* of Haham Pereira, Bram's teacher, which was then draped over the coffin when it was brought into the synagogue. I placed the decoration he received from the Queen on top of his coffin.

Hundreds of people streamed into the synagogue. I was in a daze, not quite believing that Bram was not the one officiating—but that he was the one being eulogized. The *hakafot* around his coffin were very moving. First came the synagogue trustees, followed by his many students and friends. Bram was eulogized by Rabbi Marc Angel, Rabbi Albert Gabbai, Judge Judith Kaye, Sid and our grandson Dr. Yossi Blum. All spoke eloquently expressing their love and respect for Bram. Yossi recalled all the fun things Opa did with him—going to Toronto by train for twelve hours, going to the car show and the boat show—all things done exclusively for Yossi's enjoyment. All our grandsons—Ari-Lev, Yitzi, Elie and Avichai—gave us so much *nahat* by escorting their beloved Opa in and out of the synagogue.



One grandchild was missing at the funeral—Tzvia, my developmentally-disabled granddaughter. Debby decided not to tell her about her Opa's death until after the *shivah*. Besides the logistics of getting her from the group home to the funeral, there was also the unpredictability of her emotional reaction to everything going on around her. We agreed that this was best for all concerned. When Debby did tell her, her response was utterly shocking: "I know that

Opa died. I saw him in my dream and he was wearing white sneakers." (After the *taharah* is performed, the body is dressed in white linen garments including white booties.)

Years before, Debby requested a blessing for her family from a great rebbe. He looked at the list of names and without knowing anything about her, said that Tzvia had a very special *neshamah*. This story of her dream reinforced that knowledge for all of us.



A close friend of our family, the journalist Ari Goldman, wrote a beautiful and moving obituary in the Wednesday morning edition of the New York Times. Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo, together with our son-in-law Earl, took on the responsibility for reciting *kaddish* for Bram. R. "Nico" also wrote an eloquent memorial article. Bensi Cohen wrote a beautiful *piyyut.*



Els Bendheim who happened to have been in NY at the time, magically transformed the living room for the *shivah*. Chairs were brought in and Bram's beloved recliner was removed and returned to Aviva. The Neustadters came in with packages of food and we were overwhelmed with the outpouring of love and attention. Aviva and Debby Neumark cooked and organized meals. The Freilich daughter-in-laws cooked gourmet meals for us. My good friend Hannah with whom I worked so happily for many years in the synagogue kitchen, took charge of the kitchen.

I did not go to the cemetery. It is to Els's credit that she convinced me to follow *minhag* Amsterdam and not go. Debby stayed with me. I don't think I could have handled it. Judy went with her family. Many good friends went to the graveside and returned to the house. In the seven days of *shivah*, the house was overflowing with people—just as Bram loved it. I was moved again and again to see people who I had not seen for years come and pay their respects. The man who had been with Opa in the hospital came to see us, countless bar mitzvah boys—now middle aged men—came with wonderful stories and recollections of their teacher. Our neighbors in the building and on the street came to pay their respects and many shed real tears. Bram was a person who truly enjoyed a wide range of people, from the most simple to the most complicated. He accepted everyone at face value and never had a bad word for anybody. This was clearly felt in the recollections of all those people who came to console us. Some of these were captured in a guest book from the *shivah*. Because the house is so small, most of the time, we attended services at the synagogue next door. When we did have services in the house, the people overflowed into the lobby and out to the front of our building. Chapters of *mishnah* were assigned to many willing people who completed them by the *sheloshim*.

The whole family was together on Shabbat, which also happened to be my birthday. To this day, it is difficult to celebrate without thinking of this sad time.



The minute we got up from *shivah*, we began to clean up Bram's things. All his clothing was given away immediately. During these days of re-organization, I found many interesting papers. In the

prayer book next to his bed was a printed poem about a mother's love for her child. I never knew he had this poem. Through this I discovered that he grieved the loss of his beloved mother privately, never burdening anyone else.

Many nights I had dreams in which Bram said to me how annoyed he was that we were touching his things and that we were piling things on his bed. In his life, you could not touch anything on his desk, in his night table or in his closet. He was a stickler for keeping records of everything—the events in the synagogue on any particular Shabbat and even prices he paid for his suits were written on the inside pocket of the jacket!

At the end of *sheloshim*, I made a big *meldadura* at the synagogue. This is a special service in memory of the deceased that includes readings from the Torah. Rabbi Herbert Dobrinsky and Rabbi Abraham Ben-Haim spoke beautifully and hundreds of people attended. Bensi Cohen wrote an eloquent Hebrew *piyyut* in Bram's memory. Bensi and his wife joined the synagogue only in Bram's last years, but he was deeply affected by his death. Bensi is a Torah scholar, a poet and a true friend. I will never forget how a day before traveling to Israel for the first time without Bram by my side—I woke up in the morning and the *mezuzah* from my bedroom door had fallen off in the night and was on the floor. I was shaking. I was beside myself. Was this a bad omen? I immediately called Bensi. It was raining cats and dogs but he was at my house in ten minutes with a new kosher *mezuzah klaf.*

In the three years following, Alex Vega and Bensi Cohen assisted by Ira Rohde led the *meldadura.*



With the help of Randolph Belinfante, we assembled many of his books and donated them to the American Sephardi Federation who set up a special little section of the library in his name. We donated several interesting items to the Joods Historisch Museum in Amsterdam. Bram's cousins in Brooklyn were the caretakers of a few inscribed porcelain pieces that were given to his great-grandparents—Clara Ricardo and Haham Lopes Cardozo—by the Queen of Holland. It was inscribed *"vergeet ons niet...."*—forget us not.

His togas were donated to the American Sephardi Federation and we gave one to Albert Gabbai. We distributed his *tallitot* to many close friends.

Many of his musical books and recordings were donated to the National Jewish Library of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.



In the year after his death, several things were set into motion—notably an endowment fund for *tefillin* for Bar Mitzvah Boys at the Jaffa Institute in Beit Shemesh. This was Debby's brainchild, knowing how much Bram loved his bar mitzvah students. The girls were inspired by Bram's description of his own bar mitzvah. He was a poor boy who had said his first *haftarah* when he was eight years old. His father was director of the children's choir and very much involved in the synagogue. After his bar mitzvah, they hosted a small *Kiddush* in their apartment that was four stories up. He never forgot how all the *hazzanim* who he so admired walked up the four flights of stairs to congratulate him. This made a very big impression upon him. Every year, the Jaffa Institute celebrates their boys' *bar mitzvot* with a festive breakfast for the boys and their families and a day in Jerusalem. The

fund underwrites all of that, along with a new set of clothes for the special day and of course, the *tefillin*. Bram's friends and students contributed and continue to contribute generously to the fund. The endowment has benefited many immigrant children, including many Ethiopians.



A year after Bram died, Stephen Kaye became very ill and died. The Kayes were like family for us and us for them. Judy Kaye was distraught because the burial plot offered her in the synagogue cemetery was not a good one. She looked into burying him elsewhere. I then remembered that when Bram was ninety, he was *Hattan Torah* and Stephen was *Hattan Bereshit*. The picture of the two of them together holding the Torah—in life—stuck in my mind. There was an extra plot available next to Bram. I called Judy and told her what it would be a great honor to lay Stephen to rest alongside Bram. She accepted. This has been a tremendous source of comfort to her, and to me.

Oftentimes, in the early morning hours, I sense that Bram is standing near my bed. I ask him what he wants and do not get an answer. On those days I ponder what he might be telling me. Perhaps as in our lives together, he was telling me not to get too riled up about things in the synagogue. "Heh—Irma. Leave it alone!" he would urge me. The only remedy for all my questions seems to be putting on one of his tapes and listening with great longing to his sweet voice.

15

A New Chapter

Throughout my life I have always faced challenges head on. There was nothing I felt I could not do despite my lack of money or a higher education. I was never afraid of hard work. If the cause was just, there was no one I was afraid to approach.

I am deeply grateful to the Almighty for having granted me the strength and ability to make a mark in this world. My marriage to Bram gave me the framework and the foundation to do many things I never would have dreamt were possible. His work in the synagogue afforded me the role of *"rebbetzin"* in the tradition of the old school. Today, many rabbis' wives are wage earners and professionals working independently of their husbands. It is no longer taken for granted that the rabbi's wife is at the service of the community. Bram and I operated as a team but I was always my own person. I am proud that I never took anything from community organizations.

So much of our life's work was devoted to maintaining the traditions we saw in our parents' homes. This explains my unswerving

devotion to our Spanish and Portuguese tradition and my resistance to diluting it in any way. Bram and I were never against progress; we simply saw it as our life's work to make sure that our beautiful *minhag* and faithful adherence to the Torah would carry over to future generations.

Amidst the profound sense of loss after Bram's death there were many rays of light in my life. The frequent visits of my bright-eyed great-grandson Nathan and his babysitter/family friend Janice were bright spots in those first difficult months. My beloved helper Hermis came into my life. We were acquainted from the home of Yetty and Max Monderer where she worked for many years. We last saw her when Bram and I visited with them at their country home in Tannersville; Hermis was there helping and was a delightful part of the visit. After Esther left, I felt a need to have a companion live with me. Hermis was available and took charge of me and of the household with a positive attitude and with a tremendous amount of energy. We argue politics and speak about religion. She bakes whole-wheat *hallah*, makes healthy muffins for me, and walks everywhere. She joins me in synagogue and knows the hymns by heart. Shabbat for her is a special day and she treats it with the ultimate love and respect. There are no words to express my gratitude to her.



My week is comprised of regular visitors and callers punctuated by an occasional overseas guest. Every Wednesday, Ruthie Raisner comes with flowers. We spend an interesting evening catching up on each other's lives. Every Sunday morning Judge Judith Kaye brings over a fresh baguette, a big smile and an occasional grandchild. I have become friends with a young woman, Janet Kirscheimer, a poet,

and an administrator for Rabbi Blanchard, Deena Blum's father. She gives a monthly class at the synagogue and has published a book of poetry. Lynn Kaye, who recently joined the staff of the synagogue, and *hazzan* Ira Rhode check in with me regularly and I am fond of both of them. Although Lynn and I don't agree on all issues, I respect her for her sensitivity to people's needs in the community.

Esther Shear is one of my few remaining peers. Our friendship goes back many years when we worked closely together on many synagogue and Sephardic communal events. Now we share grandchildren stories, accounts of our aches and pains and doctor's visits. I often speak to Janine Deutsch, daughter of our dear late friends Reuben and Louise Franco. As an only child, she sees me as a link to her late parents.

I also maintain regular contact with Seliene Dreyfus, the daughter of Ellie and Hans Fernandes. Ellie was my confidante in Suriname and she was the one who brought me the airport when I left home. Seliene is currently working on her memoirs and we have a good time reminiscing and comparing notes on the challenges of writing one's life's story.

There are other precious people who visit me when in town who link me to the younger generation. Yechiel, Els Bendheim's brilliant assistant, always comes when he's in the States. Malka and Edna Friedman, family of my Judy's sister and brother-in-law Tamara and Uli are like family to Judy and Sid. When visiting from Israel, they never fail to make the trip from Brooklyn to see me. Their close relative Rabbi Mordy Besser is principal of Manhattan Day School, the school my daughters and now my great grandson, attend. The Krants never fail to visit with all the goodies from Holland.

Bram's pew-mate after his retirement was Stephen Neuwirth, a leading New York corporate lawyer. Several times a year, he comes to minyan and then joins me for a delightful breakfast. He is a

wonderful friend. My podiatrist Naomi Freistat is an old friend who I always enjoy seeing and laughing with. There is no better medicine than laughter. Gloria and Richard Kestenbaum, close friends of Judy's, come to visit almost every Shabbat after services on their way to visit his parents. They are warm and lively people and I always feel decades younger in their company. At the end of Shabbat, Phil Sherman comes over and recites the *habdalah* for me.

With our advancing years, entertaining had already become more difficult for Bram and I as a couple. Now, without Bram at the head of the table, entertaining has become almost impossible for me to bear. I never imagined having to say *kiddush* for myself and to host people on my own. There are wonderful people who have helped fill that vacuum, good friends like Dasha Rotenberg, who is on her own as well and often joins Hermis and me on Friday night. Dasha is an interesting and highly intelligent person. When Aviva (nee Bendheim) and Marvin Sussman are in town they extend an open invitation to me. The warmth of their hospitality and the love and attention given me by her delightful children makes my Shabbat complete. The Eisenmanns—Muk and Vivian as well as Esther and her husband, have an open door policy towards me that I deeply appreciate. Unfortunately, I am not a night owl and usually have to pass on many invitations because they are simply past my bedtime.



One of my greatest frustrations is my impaired mobility. I can no longer run around the way I used to. It is very difficult for me, both financially and physically, to pick up and travel to my beloved Israel. I sometimes debate whether Bram and I did the right thing, remaining here and not moving there. Going through all the endless papers and books in our apartment, I know that Bram would

not have survived the move. For now New York is my place, but my heart longs and yearns for Israel where I have family, beloved grandchildren, so many friends and so many projects.



Aging is a strange thing. It is a natural process that occurs without our noticing. Even though my week is no longer comprised of luncheons and meetings and instead is filled with doctor's appointments, physical therapy and endless dentist visits, I nonetheless remain young at heart, sharp of mind and full of energy. As long as one feels well and can think clearly, one does not truly feel old. It was definitely sobering to suddenly find myself a widow, unable to live without help, unsteady on my feet and bereft of many close friends. Most difficult to adjust to is the loss of friends and peers, and along with them whole worlds filled with places, people and ideas that have changed or disappeared.

The places may have changed and the people may no longer be there, but the memories are as vivid as ever. I am grateful to you, dear reader, for allowing me, in the absence of friends with whom I can reminisce, to share my story with you.



GLOSSARY

Aleph Bet—Alphabet in Hebrew

Aliyah—Literally a "going up: "moving to Israel or being called to the Torah

Al Kiddush Hashem—In sanctification of G-d's Name

Ayin Harah—The evil eye

Ba'al Toke'a—The person who blows the shofar

Bayit Ne'eman B'Yisrael—[May you build a} Faithful House in Israel—a blessing given a newlywed couple.

Bekhor—Firstborn son

Birkat HaMazon —Grace After Meals

Brit Milah—Ritual circumcision for a Jewish 8-day-old boy or a male converting to Judaism.

Cabana—Succah in Spanish, a hut in which Jews dwell on Succot

Esnoga—Synagogue in Portuguese (*snoge* in Dutch)

Etrog—A citrus fruit used ritually on Succot

Gravidade—Stately comportment in Portuguese

Habdalah—Ceremony marking the end of Shabbat or a holiday

Haftarah(ot)—Portion from the Prophets read after the Torah reading

Haggadah—The text used at the Passover seder and amongst the Spanish & Portuguese—another word for the Passover seder

Hakafot—Ritual circuits with accompanying prayers recited on various occasions including holidays and funerals

Halakhah—Jewish law

Hallel—Special prayers of thanksgiving recited on holidays and festivals

Hametz—Leavened products forbidden on Passover

Haroset—Sweet mixture symbolizing the mortar used by the Israelites in Egypt that is served as part of the Pesach seder

Hashkabot—Memorial prayers

Hattan Bereishit—The person, referred to as a bridegroom (hattan), honored on Simhat Torah with reading the first portion of Genesis (Bereishit)

Hattan Torah—The person, referred to as a bridegroom (hattan), honored on Simhat Torah with reading the last portion in Deuteronomy

Haver—Title of honor given to distinguished Jewish leaders in Europe

Hazzan—Prayer leader, similar to "cantor" in the Ashkenazic tradition, but fulfills many other religious functions in Sephardic congregations

Hebra (Kaddisha)—Ritual burial society

Heikhal—Holy ark where Torah scrolls are kept

Hesder—An arrangement in modern day Israel under which yeshiva boys are allowed to both learn Torah and serve in the Israeli army.

Hessed—Loving kindness

Hol Hamoed—Intermediate days of Passover and Succot

Huppah—Wedding canopy, also wedding ceremony

Kaddish—Prayer in sanctification of G-d's name which requires a quorum; it is a part of the regular service but is particularly associated with honoring the memory of the deceased

Kasher—Kosher, suitable to eat according to Jewish law

Klaf—Hebrew parchment upon which Torah scrolls, *mezuzot* and *tefillin* are written

Kohen—A member of the priestly class, direct descendents of the Biblical Aharon

Kol Nidre—The prayer ushering in Yom Kippur which is a nullification of vows

L'haim—"To Life"—a toast or a celebration for momentous occasions, including an engagement

Lulab(v)—Palm frond used ritually on Succot

Maot Chittim—The mitzvah of providing for the needy before Passover

Matzah—Unleavened bread for Passover use

Mazal—Fate or fortune; from the Hebrew word for "constellation"

Megillah—Scroll read on Festivals, usually referring to Purim's Megillat Esther

Meldadura—A ceremony commemorating the *nahalah* of a family or community member, comprised of readings from the written and oral Torah

Mezuzzah(ot)—Amulet for doorposts containing four *parshiot* from the Torah

Mikveh—Ritual bath

Minhah—Afternoon prayers

Minyan—Quorum of ten men needed for prayer

Mishnah—Also called Shas (*Shisha Sedarim*—the "six orders) referring to its six main divisions. The Mishnah reflects debates on the Oral Law between 70-200 CE by the group of rabbinic sages known as the Tana'im.

Minhag—Custom (which can vary based on place of origin)

Mitzvah—One of the Torah's positive commandments

Mohel—One who performs a brit milah (Jewish ritual circumcision)

Moshav—Organized community of private landowners in Israel

Nahalah—Hebrew date of the passing of a loved one, marked each year with the recitation of *kaddish*, learning of Torah and sometimes a meal in honor of the departed (*yahrtzeit* in German)

Neshamah—Soul

Nusah—Liturgical tradition

Oma/Opa—Grandmother/grandfather in Dutch and German

Parnas—President of the congregation, in Portuguese

Parnassah—Livelihood

Parashah/Parshat HaShabua—The weekly Torah reading

Piyyut—Jewish liturgical poem

Seder—Ritual meal with accompanying texts for Passover; also, for Tu B'Shvat, the New Year of the Trees

Segan—Vice president of the congregation

Selihot—Penitential prayers said in the High Holiday season

Semahot—Joyful occasions (plural of the word "*simhah*")

Seudat Habra'ah—Mourner's meal eaten after a burial

Shabbat HaGadol—The "Great Shabbat"—the Shabbat preceding Passover

Shamash—Sexton or beadle

Sheba Berachot—Seven Blessings—celebratory prayers said in honor of a bride and groom for seven days after the wedding

Sheitel—Yiddish for wig covering hair for modesty

Sheitel Macher—Yiddish for a woman who fixes *sheitels*

Sheloshim—The end of the thirty days following the passing of a relative or loved one

Shirah—Song, most specifically the "Song of the Sea," as recorded in the book of Exodus

Shiur—Torah lesson

Shivah—Seven-day mourning period

Shohet—Ritual slaughterer

Succah—Hut in which Jews dwell during Succot

Taharah—Ritual washing of the dead prior to burial

Takhrikhim—Linen garments in which the dead are dressed before burial

Tallit—Prayer shawl, worn by Sephardim from the age of bar mitzvah

Tebah—Readers desk, usually positioned in the middle of the synagogue

Tefillin—Phylacteries—ritual boxes containing Torah texts, and straps worn by men over age thirteen during morning prayers

Tikkun—Book with side-by-side Torah texts as they appear in the Torah scroll and as they appear with full vowels and cantillations

Yom Tob(v)—Jewish holiday

SURINAME JEWISH HISTORY

The following material has been taken with permission from a wonderful web site: Suriname-Jewish-Community.com

The Arrival of Jewish Settlers in Suriname: the Oldest Existing Jewish Community in the Americas!

Our history begins in the 1630s with the arrival in Suriname of the first group of Jews. They were of Portuguese Jewish descent, originally from Holland, Portugal, and Italy. Sent by the Portuguese to settle the newly-discovered Brazil, the Jews were assured amnesty from the Inquisition for a period of 100 years. When the amnesty ended, they came to Suriname via Recife in Northern Brazil. The group settled near Thorarica, the old capital of Suriname, on the left bank of the Suriname River approximately 50 kilometers south of present day capital city Paramaribo. Almost immediately, these new immigrants started to establish a number of sugar plantations.

In 1652, a second group of Jews arrived in Suriname along with Lord Francis Willoughby, the English Governor-General for the West Indies, who colonized the country for England. This group settled on the savannah near the Cassipora creek.

In 1664, a third group of about 200 Jews arrived from Cayenne (today's French Guyana), after the French occupied the area previously under the Dutch crown. This group, under the leadership of David Nassy, fled to Suriname and also settled on Cassipora creek.

In recognition of the importance of the Jewish population in the colony, the British colonial government granted several special privileges to the community on August 17, 1665. These included: freedom of religion, permission to build synagogues and Jewish schools, the right to have their own court of justice and private civic guard (army). These rights made the Jews in Suriname the only Diaspora community to achieve complete political autonomy before the founding of the State of Israel.

The first synagogue, a wooden one, as well as some schools, were built thereafter (1671) at Cassipora.

When Abraham Crijnssen captured Suriname for the Dutch province of Zeeland in 1667, the Dutch commander left the privileges granted to Jews by the English untouched. In addition to local political realities, international political events also had a significant impact on the community. In order to expand their plantations, the Dutch swapped New Amsterdam (present-day New York City) for the English territory Suriname in 1667 as part of the Breda treaty to end the war between England and Holland.

The Growth of the Jodensavanne

In 1669, the Dutch granted David Nassy the right to establish a colony to become known as Jodensavanne, (the Jewish Savannah).

The Jews from Thorarica and Cassipora moved and joined the Jodensavanne, also called The Portuguese Jewish Nation, or Jerusalem on the River.

The Jodensavanne developed rapidly due in large part to the Portuguese Jews' knowledge of planting which turned the area into a flourishing agricultural community. The Jodensavanne became the pillar of the entire colony of Suriname.

In 1685, a second synagogue was built, this time with bricks. It was located in the Jodensavanne and called Beracha v' Shalom (Blessing and Peace in Hebrew).

By 1694, the Jewish community had grown to approximately 570 people. The wealthier among them owned about 40 sugar plantations and employed a sizeable number of slaves. The community continued to flourish, and in 1760, historic references suggest Jews plantations numbered 115 out of a total of 400 plantations in the country.

The Jodensavanne graveyard with its marble gravestones imported from Europe attests to the wealth of the community and was considered to be one of the most beautiful in South America. Many things about the community can be learned from the tombstones. Most Jews of this community lived more than seventy years, which was older than most Jews in Europe. There is proof that Jews of Jodensavanne adopted medicines which the native Amerindians and enslaved Africans took out from local plants. Tombstones show that they had rabbis, hazzanim, teachers and mohalim, with images illustrating each. Women's graves often had an image of a tree branch signifying the number of children she had.

The Decline of the Jodensavanne

Various events in the 18th century had a profoundly negative impact on our community in the Jodensavanne:

- In 1712, the French Admiral Cassard and his pirates invaded Suriname, demanding a sizable tribute from the population. The prosperous Jews had to pay the greater part of it in sugar, hard cash, sugar mills and slaves. The country never recovered completely from this event
- The decrease in value of sugar cane as a result of the introduction of beet sugar in Europe;
- The collapse of Dietz, the Amsterdam sugar cane trading house in 1773;
- Real estate loans that went unpaid;
- Worsening security conditions as a result of the continuous conflict with the Maroons (escaped slaves);
- The depletion of the agricultural soils;
- The development of the new capital, Paramaribo;

With all these dramatic events and challenges, the collapse of Suriname's plantation-based economy was inevitable.

As a result of these changes, many inhabitants of the Jodensavanne left to settle in the new capital of Paramaribo. They traded their agriculture roots and became merchants, storekeepers, artisans, peddlers and professionals.

The Paramaribo Jews continued to return to celebrate the holidays in the Synagogue in the Jodensavanne until 1832. That year, on September 10, a fire raged through the village, reducing all the

houses to ashes, including the 147-year-old synagogue. Within a few years the dense jungle overgrew the remains of the Jodensavanne.

On April 2, 1825, the special privileges granted to the Portuguese Jewish citizens of Suriname were terminated by order of the Dutch crown. Thenceforth, Jews in the Dutch colonies were accorded the same rights as the other inhabitants, and all privileges, concessions and exceptions of whatever nature were abolished.

During World War Two, the Dutch government imprisoned Dutch Nazis in Jodensavanne. The Dutch forced the Nazis to clear the old settlement and uncover Jewish tombstones. 436 tombstones were uncovered; only 59 were readable. They also uncovered the remains of a synagogue built in 1685 and a mikveh.

Jewish Life Today

It can be said that Jewish life in Suriname today experiences many challenges. When Suriname was granted independence from Holland in 1975, almost 35% of Suriname's population left the country, fearing a collapse of the new country's economy. Many members of the Jewish community were among them. When a brutal civil war erupted in the late 1980s, more members left the country.

Today, the Jewish community is a small one and consists today of about 300 individuals or about 130 members. A few years ago, the Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewish communities merged and the congregation uses the magnificent wooden Neve Shalom Synagogue that was built between 1835-1837. The smaller, Zedek v' Shalom Synagogue (Justice and Peace in Hebrew), built in 1735, will be exhibited at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem in May 2010.

A few years ago, the Jewish Community changed from Orthodox to Liberal. Due to lack of financial resources, there is no Rabbi. The Cantor (*hazzan*) runs the Friday night and Shabbat services.

Jewish life today is centered in the Neve Shalom Synagogue. The shamash (caretaker) building that is located near the synagogue houses the congregation's office, a small museum and the library. The Mahamad (community center) and the former house of the Rabbi are also situated on the huge premises of the synagogue, together with the gravestones that were saved from the first Sephardic cemetery.

In 2008, the community completed the renovation of the 148-year-old *mikveh* with the help of private donations.

Robles de Medina Family Tree

I.

Mosseh Robles de Medina

(b. 1695 Granada, Spain) (d. Dec. 5, 1769, Paramaribo)

Married (in Spain or Lisbon) to

Rachel d'Anavia

(b. Spain) (d. 1778, Paramaribo)

Arrived 1730 in Suriname with son and daughter born in Granada.

Younger son born later in Suriname

II.

Jacob Robles de Medina

(b. 1721, Lisbon, Portugal)

Married to

Abigail Henriquez

(b. 1730 Joodensavanna)

III.

Ishak Robles de Medina

(b. 1742, Paramaribo)

(d. 1762, Paramaribo)

Married to Luna Monsanto

(b. 1746, Barbados)

(d. March 15, 1842, Paramaribo)

(mother : Esther de Leon daughter of Abraham de Leon)

IV.

Samuel Ishak Robles de Medina

(b. April 31, 1785, Paramaribo) marries

Judith del Castillo (b. Paramaribo)

At this point when his daughter Judith is born, the de Medina name has been dropped and the family is registered as Robles.

Judith Robles (b. 1820 d. 1884) Married

Aron Bueno Bibaz (September 1840)

V.

Rafael Robles marries Henriette Tull

Branches out into

Eggers, Betting,Oogarts, Buite, Sedoc, Halfhide, de Vries families

Ishak Robles marries Marianne Simons

Branches out into

De Miranda, Donk, van Praag, Wijnschenk, Knockaert, Brook families

Deborah Robles marries Abraham Cohen de Lara

Luna Robles (B. 1814–1893) unmarried

Abraham Robles, unmarried

Richard Robles married to Judith Heymans

Branches out into

Gomperts, Samuels, Ezechiel families

Robles de Medina Family Tree

My great grandfather:

Joseph Robles

(b. Dec. 11, 1819) married Abigael de Vries

Rachel Robles–unmarried

Judith Robles married Samuel H. Nassy

Abraham Robles married Hanna Catherine Kuster 1910. Converted to Judaism.

Attached his mother's name

Became Abraham de Vries Robles

Samuel Robles married Maria Yveld daughter of Jacoba Yveld (1899)

Grandparents:

Isaak Robles (August 13, 1856–February 2, 1896) marries

Rachel Kanteman (July 25, 1855–December 10, 1933)

daughter of Juda Naftali (Nathan) Levie and Esther Samuel Jessurun

VII.

My parents:

Juda Robles (August 20, 1888–December 19, 1949) married

Julie Sipora Fernandes (July 19, 1897–8 Nissan, 1966)

Papa's siblings:

Jacqueline Robles-unmarried

Josephina Richel Robles (1883-1949) marries

John Allison da Costa (1882-1960)

Abigael Robles (1879-1907) marries David Daniel Ezechiel

Esther Robles(1881-1913) marries David Daniel Ezechiel

Judith Robles (1885-1954) marries Henry Nahar

Rachel Robles (1890-1960) marries Jacob Mozes de Barrios

Robles de Medina Family Tree

Mama's siblings:

Elizabeth

Betsy

Estelle

David

My siblings:

Ewald—Willy Robles

Loekie, Robbie

Dorine—Harry Emmanuels

Henry, Yvonne, Dorothy

Jules—Carla

Bianca, Guido

Letitia—Frank Del Prado

Reuben, Daniella

Immediate Family:

Irma—Abraham Lopes Cardozo

Deborah—Earl Smith

Yossi Blum, Zvia Blum, Yitzhak Smith, Chana Tziporah Smith

Judith—Sid Tenenbaum

Ari-Lev, Elie, Avichai



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A memoir of my life as I lived it, from Suriname to Washington, D.C. and eventually New York City. This book bears witness to more than eight decades of Jewish life and the many wonderful people I have been privileged to meet along the way.

—Irma Miriam Lopes Cardozo

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