

Where does one begin to tell the story of a childhood in Muizenberg during its halcyon years of endless beach and windswept water, when the world seemed perfect and the shame of our ease and comfort took the form of beloved domestic servants who were family members? With separate facilities. Is the best starting point necessarily the year in which one was born? I have thought long and hard about this and, for me, there are so many best starting points. The years of being independent and free to play at friends' houses until dark and then run home safely to the welcoming home of my parents, Abe and Pearl Davis, my siblings Stan and Netty, and my Bobba, Esther Bryna Herman who lived with us in Windermere Road, until I was 17 and she passed away. The years of skipping nursery school and being schooled in life and stories by my Bobba, who took me with her to have tea with her friends in salons where only Yiddish was spoken and tea was sipped from saucers with a sugar lump in your mouth. The years of watching boys from upstairs in shul and going to socials in summer and hoping my father who sold Coke and Fanta and chocolates in the kitchen of the Herzl Hall while Jimmy Retief and the Idiots or Shag or one of the other local bands played in the darkened hall with hundreds of teenagers dancing closer and closer as the night wore on. Wearing mini dresses up to our thighs.

There are so many starting points that would lead to long complex sagas filled with memories and life unfolding for me and the great big community that enveloped me with recognition and with warmth, even though not everyone in the community knew me. But I knew them.

But I think it is probably best to start at the beginning, then I can trace the chronological events without jumping back and forth. Although the act of writing this down will spark memories long hidden. I know that.

On September 6, 1954, I was born at the Booth Memorial Hospital in Oranjezicht, like my brother and sister before me. When I came home to Windermere Road, the name of our house was not changed to include me. So "Stanette" remained the name of my house forever, until we also had the number 65 assigned. My nanny, Corrie, was also in residence at the time, though I do not remember her too well, since my Bobba became my main caretaker, making the tasty wheat porridge for me and giving me chocolate sprinkles to melt on top, or making white bread and butter squares for me to dip into cocoa and make chocolate bread. So, without much effort on my part, my nickname as a little girl was Fatty. Or, as the gardeners and domestic workers walking past our house on their way to work every morning would call me, "Fetty."

I was always in the front garden because, unlike my peers, my parents did not send me to nursery school. I am not sure why since distance was not the issue. I already lived in Windermere Road and the nursery school was a mere 10-minute walk towards Prince George's Drive. Maybe there were financial problems I didn't know about, since no problems were ever discussed in front of the children...But my reward is that I spent every day of my formative years with my Bobba. She called me Mushelah. We spent time in the kitchen – me squeezing white beans out of their skins after they had been soaking all night, to make bean soup – and I watched the taiglach being boiled in syrup and the gedemfde chops being prepared. Bobba rescued my mom from the chore of cooking. We would also go for walks to drink tea with Mrs. Sonia Wolshonock. She was an old, wispy woman – an alte iddene is how I heard women like her described - who lived on the less prosperous side of Cromer Road. Her husband was the Schachat at the abattoir and used to come home to False Bay on the train bringing with him brown paper wrapped livers, and he used to give this as a gift to my Bobba. To put another spin on fairy tales,

the Wolshonocks would be happy ending to a Hansel and Gretel story, since they were the kindest most loving couple camouflaged in personas that could have been quite scary to a small child.

My Bobba was not the kind of woman who gossiped and frittered her days away. She was a serious woman who taught herself English and read voraciously. More of her later. Mrs. Wolshonock was tiny and kind and chattered away with my Bobba in Yiddish while we sat in her sepia-toned home and drank tea. She had the samovar in her dining room and we had tea that we poured into saucers and drank through the sugar cube in our mouths. I do not know what they talked about. My Bobba told me that Mrs. Wolshonock had been a medical student in the home country. She and her husband had no children so she was always happy to have me there.

Bobba's other great friend was Mrs. Yankelowitz. They always called each other Mrs. Never by their first names. Mrs. Yankelowitz's children were Aunty Rose Jonas and her sister, Salome. Aunty Rose was my mom's great friend and she lived in Dover Road.

I must digress now to say that every Sunday my dad took us to Mr. Raad to buy toffee apples and the result of my sugar cube tea parties and Sunday treats was a filling at Dr. Eisman's dentistry practice on the Main Road when I was six. I had gas and remember that this made me hallucinate.

We would also listen to my Bobba's records in Yiddish. Even as a little girl I recognized the loss and longing in some of this music and even now, when thinking about the song "Vu nempt mir a bissele mazel, vu nempt mir a bissele glick?" it makes me want to cry.

So instead of learning about the Jewish holidays and singing children's songs and playing in sand pits with my little peers, I was steeped in the serious world of elderly Jewish women from the old country who had left dreams behind them and had made new lives in a foreign land.

My mother made life fun. In the winter school holidays my mother used to take the three children to feed the pigeons on the promenade. The winter days in Muizenberg with the light northerly onshore surf were perfect. She used to take me and Bobba shopping in Wynberg, at least once a week. We would go to the OK Bazaars and the other shops, always stopping at the wonderful bakery on the way back to the parking lot. We would never not go in and buy a cake. I was still Fetty.

Everyday when my dad came home from work in town, he would change into his bathing costume, put on his yellow toweling beach gown, put a small bottle of olive oil and some cotton wool in his gown pocket, and we would pile into the car and go to Sunrise Beach. He called it Yoks Beach. We somehow bypassed the Christian Beach moniker and it went from Yoks to Sunrise as our awareness grew. He would dip the cotton wool in olive oil then plug his ears. A lifetime of swimming, off the pier in Cape Town as a boy – he was born at number 2 Prince Street, Gardens, playing water polo at the Long Street Baths with his brothers, and then swimming daily in Muizenberg made him very aware of swimmers' ear which he was trying to avoid. His brother, Uncle Simon Davis, lived in Gloria Heights, Axminster Road, a very handsome house that stood us on different social standings, but the brothers were close. Every Sunday in winter uncle Simon would come over before lunch for a whiskey with my dad. I don't think it happened in summer because we were always on the beach on Sunday mornings.

Unlike the holiday makers, our family always came home for lunch, much to my young chagrin, since I wanted to be on the beach from morning till night. Thankfully. The subsequent squamous cells and

actinic keratosis would, I fear, have been even worse had we stayed those extra 1 pm to 5 pm hours on the hot, summer Sundays...

My siblings seemed so much older then – Stan, five and a half years older, and Netty, three and a half. But they played with me. Netty played school school with me with a little blackboard and she taught me to read and write and do sums so that by the time I started Sub A, I was well ahead of the game. Stan took me to play marbles on the field next to the Liebrecht's house, opposite a whole slew of other Jewish family homes, between Dartmouth and Dover roads. What is a ten-goon-shy? What are ironies? Well, I know what they look like and can picture them in my head, but hard to explain.

Stan and Netty also took me to the park and I remember climbing up the new slide and being too darn "bang" to slide down. So one of them had to run home to get my mom, who climbed up to rescue me and slid down with me. Don't know why one of them didn't think of doing that and saving me from the humiliation of about 30 kids waiting their turn on the slide.

My great friend in my little girl days was Karin Berghaus. Now Karin Lurie, and still my great friend in San Diego. She first lived in Watson Road, right across from the railway line close to False Bay station, then she moved to The Row, across from the wonderful Zandvlei park. From our earliest years, we played with happy abandon. Paper dolls with cut out clothes, Flying Car – way ahead of our years as our imaginations envisaged cars being able to fly to wherever we wanted to go, picnics at Zandvlei – just she and I going off alone to play on the swings or go to the further edge of the park to make daisy chains in the spring. We played with Lynn Kay (Leeorah Hursky) and with all the other Jewish girls in our class, Mabelle, Angela, Micheline, Elaine, Margot, and others. Karin's family had a woman called Elizabeth whose surname I forget, who worked for them and was like another mother, and we had Eunice Baartman, our much beloved domestic servants who were part of both our lives back then.

One thing that only locals know is that, in the late 50s, the Jewish mothers used to bring hot lunches to their children at Muizenberg Junior School and come 12.30 pm, the old cars, including my mom's Austin with a running board, lined up along the pavement on the side of the school and the older siblings stepped out of the school grounds (permission always granted by principal, Mr. W.W. King) and into the back of the car. Our car invariably held a basket with cottage pie, the hot potato crust crispy and golden right out of the oven) and I remember some of the other kids hanging along the fence watching, with big hungry eyes. How pampered us children were by our Yiddishe mamas, even the Anglicized ones who were first generation South Africans. Luckily, by the time I went into Sub A, this odious practice had ended and we could thankfully take Oros in a flask and chicken sandwiches with mayonnaise and pickled cucumbers (on the good sandwich days) and eat lunch like a normal kid between bouts of Bobbies and Thieves and Cowboys and Indians.

We had Religious Instruction at junior school and however many times a week that was, the Jewish kids in both classes of whatever the standard (there were typically two classes per standard in those days) would get together and one of the teachers would tell us Old Testament stories, while our classmates in the next- door class, would hear New Testament stories.

One day, in Standard Two or Three, the girl sharing my two-person desk, told me that she wished Hitler would have done a better job. I then stabbed her with my pencil in her arm and the lead came out. We were both sent to the principal's office but only she got into trouble. The Jews had clout in Muizenberg.

My house at school was Dark Blue. Like my brother and sister. The other houses were Light Blue and Gold. I just remember that Mervyn Gold was in Gold, as was my beloved red-headed friend, Leeorah, then Lynn. We had our sports days on the field that subsequently became the famous rugby field where my late, great neighbor, Cedric Kushner, organized leagues that brought many of the teenage boys together and the girls to watch, even the younger ones like me.

Cedric went on to become a legend and you should google his name since writing about him here would become a book.

Let's just say that he was the first person I ever knew to put playing cards in his bicycle spokes to make it sound like you were riding a motor bike when you pedaled your bicycle (kind of, or at least that is my recollection), the first person to shave his head totally so his hair would grow back better (maybe he had lice and didn't want anyone to know), and the first person, with my sister, to start making tie-dyed t-shirts commercially in South Africa. The two of them had a business and our backyard clothesline had hundreds of beautiful, tie-dyed shirts hanging out to dry for weeks at a time. They sold them to Garlicks until their interest waned. He was also the person who made the best Sunday night backyard braais ever. I was never invited but Stan and some other guys were, and I stood on our side of the backwall and got a few tastes. That's where I heard about mixing tomato sauce and Worcester sauce for the marinade. Cedric went on to become a music and a boxing promotor and never ever forgot his Muizenberg friends. He passed away a few years ago and someone should make a movie about him.

The characters of Muizenberg can be a documentary. And the range of people in it would be the full spectrum. There was Archie Lear who was a beloved member of the community who hitch-hiked everywhere. There was Chippy, the total skate, who hung out at Muizenberg Corner and had a pickled face, no teeth, and once broke into a place to burgle it only to find himself in the lounge with everyone there. Also, a strange Rasputin type figure with long stringy black hair who lived upstairs in one of the flats either in Kent Building or in York Road upstairs from where Mr. Gordon's haberdashery store was, and who wandered around solo like a walking ghost with a scary past. But we didn't know anything about him. At least, my friends and I didn't.

There are many stories that I will not tell that I heard from others about who lived outside the strict and conservative moral codes that were the order of the day and also stories about who belonged to the communist party and had radical views that might get them into trouble.

Those whom I knew best were in the confines of the Jewish community: Who collected the blue boxes – memories of Ray Cohen walking from house to house are so vivid. She would visit and collect the money and write out receipts from her little book. She was married to Fred, with his British accent, and herself had a European accent that reflected a painful past. I did not know their story. Who put on Bnoth Zion fairs at the Muizenberg Pavilion every year and had rummage sales to raise cash - My mom was always in this group and later in the group of women who catered lavish brochas at the Herzl Hall in Wherry Road for all manner of celebrations there. Who would get calls in the middle of the night with news that someone had died – my dad was on the board of the Chevra Kadisha in Cape Town for so many years and I just assumed these calls at all hours that I heard were part of life. Who were the butchers, the dairy folk, the doctors, the pharmacists.

Later, as a teenager, I worked summers and Saturday mornings at Tockar's pharmacy in Beach Road. Solly and Jean were beloved friends of my parents and Jean is still an active and committed part of the Muizenberg Jewish Community and a woman who has given so much to this incredible town. I was a hippy in those days and was friends with many of the crowd at the Corner. There were many a Saturday morning where someone or another would amble across the road and ask to buy a bottle of Romilar. It was a prescription cough mixture that made you high. I would explain that it was prescription only. Not sure why they thought they could ask me and I would oblige! Maybe they saw me as cool and not part of the boring oldies who messed up their fun. Anyway, and Jean when you read this you will be amused, I sometimes used to go in the dispensary and look at the ingredients on the Romilar label to see what most closely approximated these on the non-prescription side of the store and see if I could maybe suggest some alternatives to the hippies (who called it Romular)!! But I never did.

It was embarrassing working there one day when a man I was serving asked if we sold French letters and I yelled out to my colleagues to find out. Judy and Tina, their names were. They both hid behind the counter laughing at me.

For High School, Aunty Lesley Cohen had sent Lindsay to Sans Souci, so many of the Jewish families followed suit and skipped the Muizenberg High School option. So Netty and I were sent off to the all-girls school in Newlands, while Stan was sent to SACS.

Then there are the stories of Ms. Nancy Rae, the chain-smoking, reed-thin elocution teacher that came to our house once a week to that the Davis kids could learn to enunciate properly in an accent that would render us more acceptable in a WASPy world. We read Jane Austen and also had to do eisstedfods – derived from Welsh poetry festivals – where we had to stand in front of hundreds at the City Hall and recite poems. This did not produce any budding actors in our family.

Also, Miss Hoffenberg who taught Stan extra Afrikaans. She lived on the hill near the high school with her sister and they were Boere Joods, but I had no concept of this at the time.

The Muizenberg library was the best place in the world and our weeknight outings after my dad's daily swim and after dinner, were going to return and take out books. Piles of them since we also chose for Bobba.

Miles and miles covered walking along Muizenberg beach, walking to St. James to my beloved friend Andy who lived on the mountainside, walking to Kalk Bay and Dalebrook – the walk that is imprinted in my mind and in my heart and which I would do daily if I could. And I have not even begun to tell you the story of my friendship with Ida and Sydney Sacks, whose uncle Gerald and aunty Miriam Milner lived next door to the shul, and who became such close friends. Ida and I used to do the main road to Kalk Bay walks together as teens and sing Happy Together by the Turtles while we walked. That was before we got ready to go out together at night on a few dates with guys our parents would never have approved of!

As I write this I think of the stories that are kind of secrets. About boys. The ones I used to watch surf from the pavilion deck, the one about whom I wrote a poem in my high school magazine and used to humour me sometimes and take me surfing with him to beaches up and down the Cape Town coast, the one who I grew up with and was my boyfriend for a little while in the early boy-girl party days and later in my twenties before I dated and married Neville.

Our school song is imprinted on the minds of everyone who ever went to Muizenberg primary and/or high school.

“We are a very happy band and that’s how it must be, we’re all of us from Muizenberg the school beside the sea...”

Not everyone in the band was happy and not everyone’s childhoods were blessed there. But happy or not, there is no-one at all who came from or still lives in Muizenberg that does not have stories to last them a lifetime. I know that mine will.

@youcantakethegirloutofmuizenbergbutyoucan’ttakemuizenbergoutofthegirl

Written with love for everyone who will read and relate on any level to this story by

Marlene Zelda Stanger maiden name Davis