

THE POSTMASTER

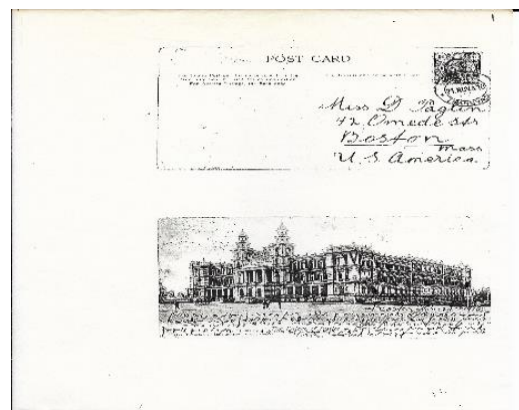
This is the early story of my grandfather, Zaida Israel Resnik [fondly known as Zaida Issy]

He was born in 1888 in Krekenova to Yisroel and Rivah Chasa. Sadly, he was born shortly after his father died and was named *Yisroel Yaacov ben Yisroel* in memory of his late father.

He married Bobba Esther Paglin on 21 November 1920



Zaida and Bobba



The letter

Growing up in the early days, Zaida never really told his story and so I now pick it from what my father Harry Resnik narrated to me:

“My Dad, aged 18, came to South Africa from Tavarig/Krekenovah/Ponoviz in 1906. He went to work for a Mr Holz in Koster as a barman and in 1910 brought his mother to South Africa. Rivah lived with her two children, Zelik Yehuda (John Julius) and Dad (Issy) and lived in Muldersdrift.

Dad went to work in a shop at the Old Jumpers mine at New Herriot for a Mr Ginsberg from Dec 1910 until July 1915. The shop burned down and he lost all his possessions. He managed to get work on the West Rand in 1915, and then onto Muldersdrift in 1916, where he joined Mr Aronowitz in a grocery shop attached to the house. One portion of the house served as the shop, where bags of grain, leather “riems”, whips, picks, shovels, plough shears and other items were displayed. The house was essentially a square building with a large stoep along the entire front of the house. The shop had an interesting corner. Here was situated the post office and telephone exchange. The building was erected by an Englishman Arthur Edgson who married Grieta Mulder and became the local storekeeper. In 1886 it became an official postal agent.

The first Post office in the Transvaal. Dad was both postmaster and phone operator.

There were four lines. One line was for the shop, another for the police, a third for the Muldersdrift Hotel and there was one for Major Mulder. Several attempts have been made to have the house and post office declared a national monument. Mr Mervyn Emms, one- time curator of the Post Office Museum, was aware of the significance of this. Several attempts have been made to have the house and post office declared a national monument.

My earliest recollection, as a child, was our house in Muldersdrift, in the District of Krugersdorp. The house served as a home for Bobba Rivah Chasa, Mom and Dad and Debby-Sarah, Morris and myself.



The original house and Post Office



Next door to the house was a rondavel, which was a butcher shop. Yes, apart from running the post office and shop, Issy was also the local “schochet”. Cattle and sheep were slaughtered in an area behind the house. The skins were dried and salted, to be sold to travelling pedlars or “smous”. In the butcher shop, a large clay pot was kept for preserving eggs. This was done by making a solution of

water-glass in water and placing fresh eggs in the solution. The eggs were preserved for a period of days or even weeks, as the solution of water-glass was impervious to air.

The entrance to the house was in the centre of the stoep. The doors were never locked. On entering the house, a passage had a door on the righthand side and at the end. The room on the immediate right was the lounge, called “The Big Room”. In this lounge the crystal set, with the earphones, was kept. It was with awe that we listened to the radio signal and looked at the “cat whisker” resting on the crystal set which produced this wonder of wonders, the sounds on the “wireless”. The “cat’s whisker” was attached to a long wire that served as the aerial. This aerial was attached to a high wooden pole outside the house. A switch near the crystal set enabled us to disconnect the aerial during an electrical storm, as the long aerial was an ideal lightning conductor. An earth wire was also part of the set. As children we were occasionally allowed into the “Big Room”. The furniture in this room was used until Mom & Dad gave up their home in Springs during 1962. One of the tables, made of English oak, is in our home, and is a prize possession. It is a table that expands, but the leaves had been lost over the years.

The door at the end of the passage brought us into a room with many doors. One door on the immediate left led into the shop. The door next to it led into a bedroom. This was the bedroom where Bobba, and Morris – or more fondly, Mosie, and I slept. On the opposite side was a door leading to Mom & Dad’s and Debby’s bedroom. A further door led into the kitchen and bathroom. The toilet was a “small house” with a “big drop” in the back yard, about 10 yards away from the house.

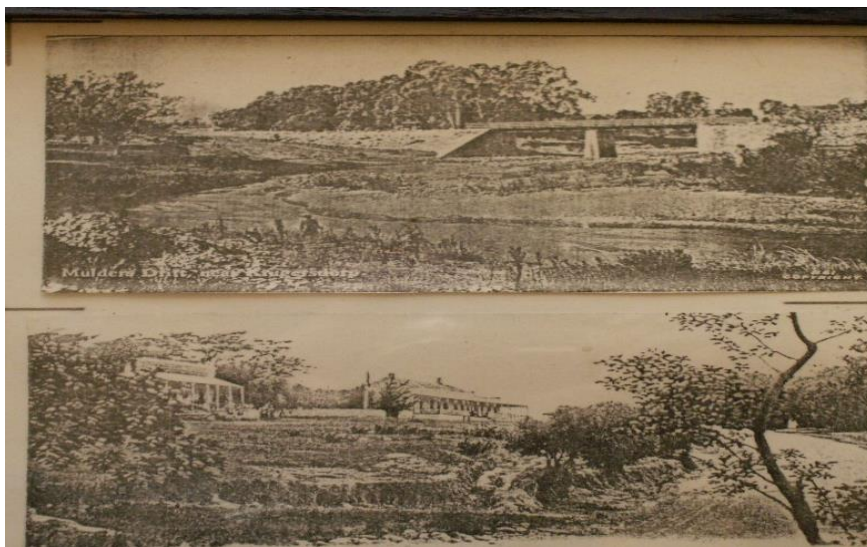
The central room was our dining and living room. There was a fire place with a hook to hold a kettle providing hot water during the winter months. How I remember the “singing of the kettle” or as we learnt in school in Afrikaans – “die keteltjie wat sing”. The result of this is that there was always hot water to brew a cup of tea or make a jug of coffee. (In those days there was no instant coffee, or even percolated coffee).



Harold and Debby Sarah in front of the house

The living room and bedrooms were painted every year with “white wash”. The kitchen had a coal stove with a water boiler attached to it. This was filled daily by bucket, as we had no running water. This hot water boiler was kept filled all day and provided us with all our needs. When we went to have a bath, hot and cold water was carried into the bathroom, in buckets.

The home that we lived in, with the shop attached to it, was on the main road from Krugersdorp to Pretoria. Close by the house was a bridge built over the Crocodile River, the source of which emanated at the Witpoortje Water Falls, between Roodepoort and Krugersdorp. The original bridge was replaced by a later bridge, round about 1930. The original road to Krugersdorp went up to the “Muldersdrift Hill” and was replaced in about 1928, when the existing road was opened. If my memory serves me right, the “new” road was officially opened by Prince Edward, the Duke of Wales, later to become King of England, as Edward the Eighth. The “old” road was used for many years by a sports car club as the venue for a race, popularly called the “hill climb”.



The Bridge

Morris and I went to the Muldersdrift school about 3 miles away. We walked all the way, through the veld. If we found donkeys along the way, we would catch them and ride to school. Along the path to school there were 2 natural fountains, with cool crystal-clear water. Here we would quench our thirst. This we did on a regular basis, until we found a snake swimming in the water. That was the end of stooping and stopping at that fountain.



Morris Harry and friend



Harry and Sarah

A favourite pastime for the 2 of us was to go fishing in the Crocodile River, near our home. The fishing rods were made of branches broken from a tree, a piece of string, a bent pin and the bait was an earth worm, freshly dug from the ground. If we caught anything, we brought it home, and Esther would fry it for us. These fresh water fish had a nice clean taste.

When I was 6 or 7 years of age, a young couple pitched a tent across the road to our house. They said they were looking for bird nests and bird's eggs. Along the banks of the river near our home the dense riverine vegetation was luxurious. The result was that there were many kinds of birds to be found there. I helped them collect the eggs, which were of many different sizes and colours. Along the river banks the riverside vegetation was luxurious and collection was easy. I helped them collect. They taught me a lot about nature, and birds and nature is and has been an important part of my life. In those early days of my youth it was wonderful to set traps and catch birds. All that was needed was a small cardboard box, a long piece of string, a few strategically placed branches. The bait was bird seed we collected and a few bread crumbs. The trap was set at an angle, with some seed in it. Then wait patiently for the bird to eat the seed or bait. Pull the string - the trap falls - with the bird inside. Carefully pick the box up and place the bird in a holding cage. Since then we no longer "rob" nests or eggs!!

Came out a few days later the tent and everything else was gone. Can't remember who this couple were, and never saw them again, wonder what has happened to them.

They taught me how to make and tie the various knots in string, knots such as slip knots, granny knots and several others. Later on, when we lived in Benoni, I joined Habonim and this knot tying knowledge came in very useful. The time spent with this couple, whose names are long forgotten, created an interest in birds and wild life that is still an important part of my life.

In those early days of my youth, it was wonderful to set traps and catch birds. A small cardboard box, a long piece of string, a few branches strategically placed and some bait was all the equipment needed. The bait was breadcrumbs or seeds obtained from grass or many other plants that grew wild, all around the uncultivated places. We sometimes used "bird lime" a gummy material that could be bought from Issy's shop. The price for a tin was a ha'penny or a penny. This gummy material was rubbed onto small twigs and placed in the bird trap. When the birds alighted on it, they stuck to it and were unable to fly away. We also used a homemade "bird lime" made from a milky foam that we got from a small aloe like plant.

Among the other friends that Zaida and Bobba Esther had in Muldersdrift, were 2 venerable gentlemen. who lived on farms across the road to where we lived, and both were poultry farmers. One was Lionel Liberty (LL) and the other Isaac Levitas. (IL). They often came to visit Dad in his shop, where they used to "shmoe-es" and solve the problems of the world. Mosie (Morris) and I were, at times allowed to listen to their discussions, but "children should be seen and not heard"

Then there was the other Yiddish family, the Safrins, our neighbours, who lived close by, about 15 miles (25KM) away. They had a shop at a place called Sandspruit, (today) Honeydew. The families got together on the occasion, on a Sunday. Big excitement because we had a telephone installed and later, they too got one. installed. We liked them to visit us, because they brought their daughter, about our age, Peachey, with them, as well as their son, Teddels. I have tried to trace them but was unable to do so.

It was also about this time that I was first exposed to hearing of anti-Semitism.

I was sitting on the veranda in front of Dad's shop, where he was speaking to an elderly venerable character by name of Oom Wynand Mulder. This Oom Wynand was part of the family that had lived in the area. Oom Wynand was a shepherd. He was too old to work on the farm, so his work was to look after the sheep and cattle. He would take the animals out to graze in the veld in the morning and then come and spend part of the day sitting in front of the shop. Most of the day he would squat on his haunches, and puff away on his pipe. He was tall, with a greyish beard and I am sure that he was very fond of Dad. They were having a serious conversation. The paper was put down, and even though I was a small boy of about 8, I read – "Steek Jode dood met messe en furke". Strange how that phrase has stuck in my memory. The newspaper referred to the rising anti-Semitic feeling in Germany. I did not realize the importance of that report, but vaguely seem to remember that this was mentioned at the supper table.

And that is the story of the first Jewish Postmaster in the Transvaal.

About 10 years ago, brothers Arthur, Ralph and Marc, undertook a return visit to Muldersdrift taking our beloved parents and aunt. It was really a special trip as they had not been back to visit the area for many years that my Dad, his sister Debby Sarah and their late brother Morris (who sadly died in action in North Africa aged 21) had grown up on. The delight and sadness on their faces as they looked over the area they had grown up on, is an image I will never forget. As memories flooded back, they pointed out many areas that are related in this story.

In loving memory to Morris 1921-1941 (Killed in action), Harold 1924-2014 and Sarah 1932-



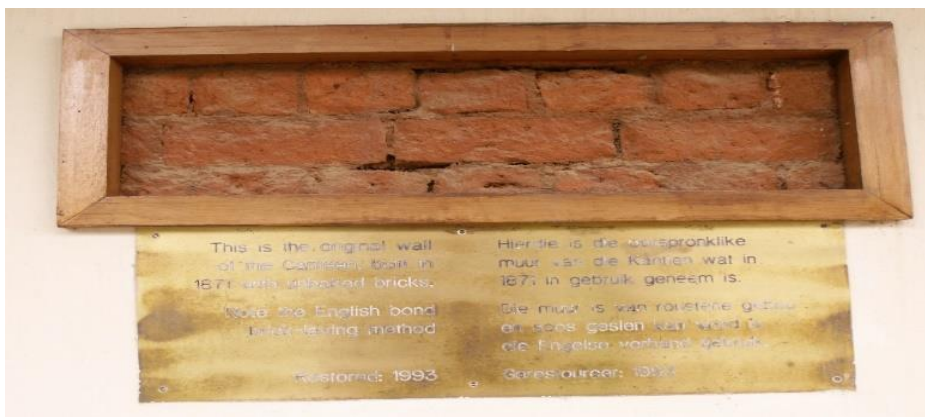
Edna & Harold Resnik & Debby-Sarah Esra



Private Morris Resnik



Part of the original wall



Canteen wall 1871(original) Inscription reads "This is the original wall of the Canteen,built in 1871 with unbaked bricks." Note the English bond bricklaying method. Restored in 1993