

## TRANSCRIPTION - CANTOR IMMERMAN VIDEO INTERVIEW

*Video interview filmed at Highlands House aged home in Cape Town in July 1997.  
Interviewer Lisa Chait. Cantor Abraham Immerman was 90 at the time of this interview.*

### INTRO AND BACKGROUND

Officially I am Abraham but they call me Abe. I was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of the 4<sup>th</sup> 1907 in Ysterplaat. My father got killed in an accident before I was born and then my late mother remarried again to a man called Simon in Zastron in the Orange Free State and I went there. And when I was 5 years old my mother passed away and then my stepfather remarried again and I stayed with my stepfather till the age of 15, in Zastron, in a little town in the OFS.

I don't remember seeing. They told me that I can't see and I had to accept it.

### CHILDHOOD & LEARNING THE JEWISH PRAYERS

When I was about 5 an old reverend Iseman taught me the Shema by heart but the actual teaching I started when I was about 7. We had the cheder, the Hebrew school that they call the cheder, we had it in our house. They didn't have a shul at that time and my stepfather and stepmother had a kosher home. And the reverend at that time was Josephowitz. He stayed with us because it was during the 1914 – 18 war and he couldn't bring his wife from Lithuania to South Africa. So he stayed with us and he taught me everything by heart. He told me there was no brail in Hebrew. I had no alternative but I had to learn everything by heart. He said it to me and I had to repeat it. I remember when I started from Genesis and it said there that the world was in darkness and the Lord said, 'Yehi Or. Let there be light' and I decided as a child I want to feel that I am enjoying some light, no matter even if I cant see, I would like to contribute light to humanity. That's what I always felt.

I accepted my life. I have never seen and I had to live like that. And my stepparents treated me nicely so I lived that way. I didn't go to school. There was no school for the blind at Zastron of course, so I had time to practise whatever I learnt. In the afternoon I had time to practice, so I used to revise it by heart all the time till the next lesson.

My stepfather had a daughter and a son in law and they had no children. My mother, when she died, left a child of 12 days old and they adopted, the Barvins adopted this boy Joe, and they also took my sister Bessie. She was my real sister and then there was another girl Helen, she was born from my late mother and my stepfather. So the Barvins took them, Bessie, Helen and Joe and they stayed in Aliwal North and I was the only child with my step-parents.

### THE WORCESTER SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

When I was 15 they sent me to the Worcester School for the Blind and there I learnt brail and I also learnt Afrikaans and English. I had to make the best of life. I was the only

Jewish boy there and I missed the Jewish upbringing but I had to accept it and on Friday night and Saturday morning they used to let me off and I used to walk on my own those days, wherever I lived, I walked on my own.

There was a Rabbi Stein at Worcester and he and his wife said to me that whenever I have off I must come to them. And I used to go to their house on Friday afternoon late, and Saturday morning early, and the children used to walk with me to shul. Then I used to come back again and I used to have supper there and then I used to come home and Saturday morning the same. I went here, came home to the Steins and I had lunch there and then I used to walk to the school again.

One of the blind boys came to me one morning and we had to write an essay every week. The principal gave us a subject and on Thursday morning we had to come to the class and the principal used to correct our essays, comment on it and tell us what we should have done and tell us where he was satisfied. And we had to type the essay so that the principal could see whether we typed well. They taught me typewriting at Worcester. And this blind boy told me that the whole week the only thing that he typed was a letter to his mother but on Thursday morning he postponed it. He thought he would be able to type it before school. And when he came he found that somebody else was using the typewriter and now when he'll come to the principal and not have his essay he will obviously get a punishment. So I asked him, 'Did you post the letter to your mother?' He said, 'Not yet'. So I said, 'I'll tell you what you must do. Take the letter, open the envelope and take the letter that you wrote to your mother and put it on the table as you enter the class. And when the principal will read it, when he'll see 'My dear mother', he will not read the next contents of the letter. Then you tell him that you posted the essay by mistake and this is the letter to your mother. You thought this was the essay'. I was just an ordinary pupil, but I thought, I felt sorry for him.

Our institution was upstairs and the school was downstairs and one morning I was going down the steps and we were writing a history test that morning, so I intended going to have a wash downstairs and then coming up again (because) we had to make up our own beds. And I met Miss Meiring and she said to me, 'What can I do for you?' So I said, 'Can you write my history test?' She said, 'No that I can't, but I can make up your bed for you and you don't have to come up again. You can go to school and revise whatever you want to before the test'. So I went to school and I revised whatever I had to and the same morning before interval a boy came in to my class and he said, 'The matron wants to see Abraham Immerman upstairs immediately!'

So I thought that Miss Meiring did not make up my bed. Why would a matron send for me when she knew that interval was in a few minutes? Anyway I don't know how I got upstairs, I must have been as pale as anything, but anyway I got up there and I was just thinking of an excuse. So she said to me that two ladies of the Transvaal visited the School for the Blind and the matron showed them how the blind people are neat. They made up their own beds. And it so happened that my bed was made up much better than all the others. So the ladies said they would like the boy who is so neat, they would

like to meet him. So then I got my breath back and I shook hands with them and that is all. They said they were pleased to meet me. And I went down again.

### DECIDING TO BECOME A CANTOR

When I was at Worcester School they wanted me to take up a trade. At that time they had trades for blind people, I don't know whether they've still got them today. They had basket making, mattress making, piano tuning. So they said that I should learn a trade and I have not been interested to remain at Worcester School longer than possible because I was the only Jewish boy there and I felt that I want to be in a Jewish atmosphere, in an environment of Jewish people.

And I made up my mind not to learn a trade but I made up my mind at that time, I was about 18, I made up my mind that I would like to teach children and I would also like to conduct services by heart in congregations, if I had the opportunity. And my relations were terribly against me. They said. 'You are making the biggest mistake of your life. Who is coming to a blind person to learn for Barmitzvah and which congregation would ever engage a blind person to conduct a service?' They said, 'You are talking nonsense.' And the more they discouraged me the more determined I was to teach and to conduct services.

So I went back to my step-parents in Zastron and then one Friday night the reverend of Zastron was not feeling well and they asked me to conduct the service and there happened to be a traveller, a gentleman from Potchefstroom and he said to me, 'You know I've got something to tell you. You are doing services by heart. How would it be if you get a boy to go with you and you go to certain congregations and you ask them to give you an opportunity to do the services either on the weekdays or the sabbath. They have never heard anybody doing it by heart and they'll let you do it and whatever they want to give you, you leave it to their discretion, you will accumulate a few pounds and buy yourself a little property or something and then you'll have an income, something to live from. Later on perhaps you may be able to get pupils to teach for barmitzvah as well, but that is only later.

So I listened to him and I managed to get an Afrikaans boy who went with me and I went to many congregations in South Africa and they allowed me to conduct services and whatever they gave me I accepted with gratitude. And when I had some money I went to Uitenhage and there was gentleman by the name of Mr Edelstein and he said to me, 'I can recommend you. With the money that you have you can buy a small semi-detached cottage and you can have a little income, rent.' And I bought that place.

### OUTDSHOORN

Then I came to Oudtshoorn and I conducted services there and when I came to Oudtshoorn the people there said to me, 'Oudtshoorn is a Jewish community'. At that time they called it 'The Little Jerusalem of South Africa'. They said to me, 'Stay here in Oudtshoorn, board and lodge with some people and you can be happy here because

you've got a little income and we will be nice to you. We like you'. So I listened to them and I stayed with a family, the Weinstein, for 11 years.

Now this boy Weinstein was the youngest of all. His name was Sime and they were very interested in me. I had only about 7 pounds a month income and from the 7 pounds I had to pay rates and taxes. So I had only about 4.10 or 5 pounds a month and the Weinstains allowed me to stay with them for 4.10 a month. And I had a room to myself, I had 3 meals a day and clean washing and then Sime Weinstein was a young boy, he was a little over 12, and he insisted that I should teach him for barmitzvah.

And another boy, a great friend of Sime Weinstein by the name of Abe Lichter, who used to visit us, heard of Sime's suggestion. He also had to become barmitzvah and his father was a reverend at Mossel Bay but he gave it up and he became a feather buyer. But anyway his father could have taught him but he said he wants Immerman to teach him because Sime Weinstein insisted on me teaching him, so he also want to be taught by Immerman. So I taught the two boys, Abe Lichter and Sime Weinstein and as it happened they did it well and they made no mistakes. And after that I got quite a few boys. There weren't too many in Oudtshoorn but those who were there mostly came to me for barmitzvah lessons.

I was taught by Josephowitz and I remembered it and if I forgot something my pupils used to have a book. I did it by heart and I wasn't ashamed to ask them to read it to me. With my pupil's help I managed to do it.

#### MORE ON TRAVELLING AROUND – HOW DID HE DO IT?

Well, this boy travelled with me and I went wherever I wanted to go. I got a concession from the railways. They said that I was 'a reader', they called me, and they gave me - the boy and myself - only one ticket. Two tickets for half price.

#### MORE ON LIFE IN OUDTSHOORN

I used to do a service sometimes I didn't want to take it away from the officials. I've never been an official of the congregation but they used to ask me on certain occasions as a friendly gesture, or if one of the officials wasn't well they used to ask me to conduct services, and I did it.

#### COMING TO CAPE TOWN

But then I wanted to conduct services for high festivals and I came to Cape Town and I came to my relations. I made it up with them. I told them that I don't need any assistance I came to them just before Rosh Hashanah and they accepted me.

And then I went to a few congregations and I asked them whether there were vacancies in the paper, in The Zionist Record, to allow me to conduct services for the high festivals. And they refused. They said, 'We would like to do it, we would like to listen to somebody who does it by heart, but we cannot accept you because, after all, if you do it

by heart it may just happen that you get stuck in the middle of a service and we've got no replacement.'

So then I was very disappointed and I couldn't help it. Eventually just before Rosh Hashanah I went to Woodstock and there was a chairman by the name of Mr Schnapps and he had a blind brother overseas so he took an interest in me. He said to me, 'Look I can engage you for the high festivals'. Why? Because the Woodstock congregation was a big Jewish community, and they had a service in the shul and an overflow service. So he said, 'You can conduct services either in the shul or at some other occasion at the overflow and if you do go wrong don't be afraid to admit it, we can always get a replacement.'

So I went there and I did the services and people came from all the suburbs to listen to a blind person conducting the services by heart. And the people came, and thank G-d they told me that I made no mistakes. So then the other congregations gave me confidence and encouragement.

At that time there was the Ponevez shul in Van der Leer street and Mr Sandler was the chairman and he phoned me saying that I must please come and conduct the services on succot, and there was no talk of a substitute. And I went there and they had confidence and since then I conducted services for more than half a century in congregations where they needed someone. I went to Salisbury in 1961, 62. I conducted services at Claremont, at Maitland, at Parow, at Belville, at the Strand, at Outdtshoorn. I don't know whether I mentioned all the congregations, but anyway at many congregations. I conducted services for high festivals. Mowbray that was the last, for over half a century.

Then my family apologised for refusing to allow me to take up the services that I did. They said they didn't think that I could do it.

#### EARLY DAYS - TEACHING AT HERZLIA

Alexander Levin, He happened to be the principal of the Herzlia School in Hope Street) at that time, and he phoned me, 'Come to Herzlia for a month. If you like it then you stay with us, if you don't we won't have anything against you.' So I was engaged to the Herzlia School. I used to teach them singing and those boys who wanted to come for barmitzvah, although there was another teacher at the school who taught for barmitzvah, but eventually they allowed me too. They said that those who want me particularly, I could teach. The result was that I had many boys for barmitzvah and I stayed at the Herzlia School for 46 years.

#### DID HE EVER FEEL NERVOUS OR WORRIED ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO DO IT ALL?

Well I, I made up my mind that I had to do it. Now actually, remembering things have (sic) not been as difficult as concentrating. You see when you conduct a service there are many verses commencing with the same words, and then they go onto other words like

'Vechol Ma'aminim', 'Im rulei lukim', many other words. And I have to remember the verse that I read and I have to remember the next one while the congregation says the verse. Now that is very difficult because you've got to concentrate all the time. And not only that, I have to realise that I am in a position where I have to do the right thing because people watch me more carefully than they watch a sighted person. If a sighted person would make a mistake they wouldn't even notice it, but me they particularly watched because they wanted to see whether I conducted correctly. I was conscious of that and I had to do everything by heart. I had to remember and I also had to concentrate, which was more difficult than to remember. But I made up my mind that that is my life and I must do it.

I prayed to G-d whenever I had to do something, to speak at an affair or to conduct services. People used to invite me to speak at weddings, at a bris, at a barmitzvah, on many other occasions. In Oudtshoorn they used to ask me sometimes to address the community and I always prayed that the Almighty should help me that I should be able to do it.

#### TALKS ABOUT MEMORY & PERFECTION

I think it's impossible to always be perfect. Sometimes you do make a mistake or sometimes you do say the wrong thing by mistake. One can't always be 100% perfect. Only the Almighty is perfect. I depended on my memory and I tried to develop it and I had to realise that I have to do it by memory.

#### MARRIAGE

I got married in 1950 to a girl Nora Canard and she passed away in 1967 and in 1970 I met Pauline Seagull, like the bird, S.E.A.G.U.L.L. and I married her and unfortunately she passed away in 1974. She had a kidney disease and the doctor said they could not cure her. Somebody introduced me to her and I met her, and she said she was eager to abandon her nursing. She'd been nursing for some time already and she wanted to give it up and I had enough money to support her because I was teaching at Herzlia and I used to teach for Barmitzvahs and the parents used to pay me, those who wanted to pay me. Those who told me they couldn't pay I never sent them back, I accepted them. As long as they told me they can't pay, told me the truth, then I was satisfied. And I felt that I could support her and I proposed to her and she accepted me.

I enjoyed having a partner, especially Pauline having been a nurse. She knew everything about health. She told me what to eat and what to do and she was marvelous to me and whatever I did happened to be right in her eyes.

*[Lisa asks if he had any children]* Not exactly. I did whatever I could and I tried to satisfy both and that's what happened. Somebody introduced me to her (Pauline) in Cape Town. She was here on holiday and then I married her. She was a nursing sister, as I told you, and I told her that I could support her and if she wanted a home she could have it and she could do whatever she likes in her home. And she was satisfied.

## STORIES ABOUT LIFE IN CAPE TOWN

I lived in Vredehoek, in Rugley Road.

I never had a guide dog. I didn't want it because I used to walk about on my own and I used to find the way. There was one thing that I always, or rather two things that I always appreciated. One was I used to walk on my own and I used to stand at the edge of the pavement and I had to cross a road. I didn't want to cross a road on my own because I don't know where the robot is, and I don't know what can happen while I cross, so I used to stand at the edge of the pavement and, without asking anybody for years and years, people used to come up to me, people I don't even know, 'Do you want to cross the road? Please.' And they used to take me across the road. People I don't know at all. I really appreciated that.

Another thing I appreciated was that my former pupils, whom I taught, used to see me in the street walking on my own and they used to stop the car and they used to say 'I am in a terrible hurry but I must stop the car and I must come and say hello to you before I go on my journey.' And I always used to tell my wife, I said, 'I really appreciated it because they could have easily passed me, I would have not known, but they did not.

And whenever I used to come, even lately to Sea Point shul or wherever I used to come, my former pupils always used to come to me and say, 'Hello, you remember you taught me for Barmitzvah?' And many of them I even remembered when their barmitzvah happened to be. Some of them I don't but some I them I still remembered the portion that I taught them.

## MEMORISING DATES & BARMITZVAH PORTIONS

I took up the calendar as a hobby. You can give me any date and I'll tell you in a few seconds the day of the week that it was. I did it as a hobby. At night when I couldn't sleep, or when I had a little time on my own, I used to calculate the calendar and that was my hobby.

I made up my mind that when a pupil comes to me I must not teach him the wrong portion because if I happen to teach one child the wrong portion I would have never taught again. And I always used to check it very carefully because there are some sabbaths that you do not read the portion of the week. You have to read a different haftorah, a different portion, and you've got to prepare the child for that particular portion because if you teach him the wrong portion then the shul would not allow him to read. What would happen then would be that if they do allow him to read, the person who reads the Torah would have to read it first and then he could sort of read it, which would be a disgrace to the parents and to myself. And I avoided that in my life.

I have never in my life taught a wrong portion to any child.

*[Reflects on a story where he taught the wrong portion to a child]* No well that was a misunderstanding. She (the mother) asked me to teach her child for barmitzvah and the

child had a lovely voice and he could read and I never asked her whether she wants the haftorah in the morning or she wants the Torah portion in the afternoon. I should have asked her but I took it for granted that he would read the maftir in the morning. So I taught him that. So after a week or two she came to fetch him one afternoon, and she said to me, 'When the barmitzvah comes would you kindly propose the toast to the barmitzvah?' And those days I didn't travel on a Saturday so I said to her, 'Depending where it will be. If it will be near the shul with pleasure but if I have to travel on Saturday morning ...' I didn't do it those days. After I had a fall 9 years ago and I hurt my hip I couldn't walk on my own anymore, the doctor said I mustn't, so I travel on Saturday, I can't help it but those years I did not. So she said, 'No you don't need to worry, he is having his barmitzvah in the afternoon and in the evening after the service we are having a dinner in Sea Point at a hotel and you can come with us on Saturday night and propose the toast.' So I said to her, 'But I am teaching him the portion for Saturday morning!' So she said, 'No its in the afternoon. Is there a different portion?' She didn't know.

So since then I made up my mind not to take things for granted. Luckily it was only a week or two after I commenced so I quickly changed it over for the afternoon. But since then I used to ask the parents distinctly, 'Do you want it in the morning or do you want it in the afternoon?' Because as careful as you are it shows you that one is not perfect. You can easily do the wrong thing.

#### MORE BARMITZVAH STORIES

One afternoon I was teaching a child for barmitzvah and in the middle of the lesson he burst out crying. Now I never hit a child in my life, neither did I send a child to the principal. If I had to tell a child something, if I thought he didn't learn the way he should, I used to tell them nicely that they've got to improve. But I've never in my life put a hand on a child. So I asked him, 'Why are you crying? There's not need to. Even if you don't know your portion 100%, I'll help you, there's no need to cry.' So he said his granny gave him a cake for me in a tin and he left the tin with the cake on the bus and he is going to get a hiding from his granny when he gets home. So I asked him to look up the lost and found property, they've got an office in Cape Town. So I phoned them and I told the girl who answered the phone that my pupil left a tin in on a bus with a cake. If anybody brings it I gave her my pupils phone number. So the next week he came and said she did phone him. Somebody brought the tin but not the cake.

One boy, I took him for a rehearsal and he read it beautifully and on the Saturday morning they phoned me as a last resort to talk to the boy because he is so nervous that they called the doctor because he told them that he doesn't want to do his portion. He is sure he is going to go wrong. So I spoke to him on the phone. I said 'Listen, you had a rehearsal and you did it beautifully and there's no need to be nervous and I will stand on the bimah and if G-d forbid you go wrong in a word I will assist you so quickly that people will not even notice it. But I am sure you will not go wrong because you had a



rehearsal and you did it well and I am not going to teach you another portion. You must be brave and you must go onto the bimah and you must do it and not disappoint your parents and the visitors who came from the Transvaal to your simcha.' So he went on the bimah and he never made one mistake and afterwards he said he was sorry that he's been so nervous.

I was teaching barmitzvahs at Herzlia. Wherever there was a vacancy for the high festivals I went there.

Sometimes I had four barmitzvahs on one Saturday and I couldn't be at the other three. So I went to one. I had to decide. I had to discuss it with the parents. They had to let me off because it was impossible for me to be all over. I had one barmitzvah at Clarmont and one in Vredehoek and one at the Gardens Shul and one in Schoonder Street and they all happened to be on the same day. I couldn't manage to be all over. So I had to explain to the parents.

Also a few times I had a twins barmitzvah. Now if you have a twin only 1 can read the haftorah. The other one has to read the Torah portion. When I had twins I used to discuss with the parents I don't want the one to be jealous and its impossible, they can't both read the haftorah because even if the congregation allows it it wouldn't be right because they would say A read better than B. You could not do it. So I used to discuss it with the parents and they had to decide who must do the Torah portion and who must do the haftorah. They had to give me the tip and they had to tell me what to do.

*[Lisa asks him if it was a competitive environment amongst the teachers]* I wasn't concerned about the other teachers. No, I didn't take it away from other teachers. I never.

There were pupils who were retarded and the teachers used to phone me. They said as a last resort, 'Please take them over. I can't teach this boy. He is retarded and I can't teach him.' So I taught him whatever I could. If I couldn't teach him the haftorah I told the parents I'll teach him a Torah portion of that week. But I did not prevent them from coming to me. I used to take them and I used to make the best.

#### STUTTERING PUPIL STORY

I had one pupil, he stuttered terribly and he said he can't say the prayer. There is a barmitzvah prayer they had to recite in synagogue in front of the ark and he couldn't do the prayer, he says he stutters. And the principal said to me, 'This boy stutters terribly. Teach him a few blessings'. And when I started teaching him I realised that when he sings he does not stutter, when he talks he does. So I taught him the whole haftorah but only I told him he must sing it very slowly. And the prayer he could not say, he stuttered too much. He didn't want it and I didn't want to force him and the shul said I was right. And I taught him to sing it slowly and I taught the officials of the shul not to interrupt him whatsoever. So it would take a few minutes longer but let him have his way. And they allowed him to sing it slowly and he did the whole haftorah. And the doctor who

was in charge of him since his infancy was there and he said I put a new life into him because they never thought that he would be able to do it.

I was there that day.

#### WHAT HE TAUGHT AT HERZLIA

Mostly singing. Hebrew songs. They gave me Hebrew songs and I had to learn them by heart. I got somebody to read them to me and I used to teach them the songs those days and also barmitzvahs, those who wanted. I enjoyed my work because the teachers and the committee and the children were marvelous to me.

I used to come to a class, they gave me ten minutes for singing and some boys used to say that I saved them because the teacher asked them a question and they didn't know the answer and I just walked in in time. And I was so used to it I never used to feel ... I've got a watch that I can feel the time and I never used to feel the time even. I more or less knew when the ten minutes expired and I used to go out and the pupils used to argue. One used to say, 'I want to take Mr Immerman to the next class. I want to take him!' And the teacher said, 'What can I do. I don't know what to do? They all want to take you!' So she used to choose two of them to walk (me). I could have done it myself but they wanted to walk with me so I couldn't say no. So they walked with me.

They gave me a timetable and they read it to me and I had to remember the timetable and when they changed it they told me and I had to remember it again.

#### OTHER INTERESTS AND PURSUITS

Well I was always interested in Jewish affairs and I like classical music. I used to listen to the radio and I used to even go to bioscope. My wife used to ask me what do I think of the picture and I used to listen to the voices and I used to concentrate and I knew exactly what was happening. But I haven't been for years and years to a bioscope.

#### JOKES

Well I liked making jokes and I always enjoyed listening to jokes and I realized one thing that when you ask somebody, 'How are you?' you expect them to say, 'I am fine.' Because once you start telling your trouble they have more trouble than you have. And when people asked me, 'Why are you always happy?' I said, 'I can't see why I should not be happy?'

#### LIVING ALONE AFTER HIS SECOND WIFE DIED

I remained in Vredehoek and I remained on my own. I had a girl who used to come in and cook for me and clean the flat and otherwise I used to do everything those days myself. I used to shave and bath and wash and dress. I did everything on my own.

### COMING TO HIGHLANDS HOUSE JEWISH AGED HOME

(I came here) in September this year because I fell a few times and I got hurt and I felt that I couldn't do things the way I have been doing anymore. I came to Highlands House in September just before Rosh Hashanah. And then in January my leg was painful and doctor Spilke (*name unclear*) came and he said I had to amputate my leg and I was very disappointed. But I had to do it and he said he doesn't think I will be able to walk again because if I could see they could have given me an artificial leg. But he says, 'You won't be able to balance yourself correctly.' And then I had to accept life without the one leg. I had to accept it. And then I had trouble with my nose, I had like a scab on it and at first they thought it was nothing and then I took a biopsy and they said I had to have 15 radium treatments, which I had. And thank G-d I went for a check a few weeks ago and the doctor was satisfied.

### REFLECTING ON THE HARDEST AND THE HAPPIEST TIME IN HIS LIFE

Well the most difficult time for me was when I had to travel from one place to another. It wasn't an easy task and also when I had to learn things by heart, things were not always easy. But I accepted life. I made up my mind that whatever happens you've got to accept the difficulty with the good. You've got to accept whatever happens.

*[About the happiest time]* Well, when I was happily married, then I was happy because I had companion and I had somebody to talk to always and to come to and to be in touch with. And it was a very happy time for me and to feel that there were people who are interested in a blind person and who do for me the things that they did. I appreciated it.

*[Is he is happy at Highlands House?]* Well I've got to accept it. I've got to accept it and I have got to thank G-d that there is such a home where they look after you. I've got to make the best of life.

### TRIP TO ISRAEL FOR HIS 80<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY

I went to Israel on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Mr Marcus gave me a ticket and I came to Israel. I hesitated. I thought not seeing is going to be very difficult but when I came there, there were two people, one was Jean Galinsky, she was a former teacher of Herzlia, and the other one was Sime Weinstein, a pupil of mine whom I taught in Oudtshoorn. And he was a chaplain in the army as well, and afterwards he worked for the Federation in Tel Aviv and they arranged a programme for me. They said I mustn't worry. I will never be alone. And the next day they had a cocktail for me and they advertised in the paper that I am there, a South African, and those who know me should come. And many people came and some of them I remembered their voices and some of them asked me when their children's barmitzvah happened to be. Some of them I remembered.

And then Sime Weinstein and a man by the name of Amnon took me on a tour to kibbutzim and moshavot and then I stayed at the Tal Hotel in Tel Aviv and I was upstairs, the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> floor, and the waiter said to me I must just ring a bell whenever I want to

go to a meal and somebody will come and fetch me because I couldn't go on my own there. You've got was a lift and you didn't know how to work it. I couldn't know how to do anything on my own there. And in the dining room I also couldn't go on my own because it was a big dining room and there were many people around and I had to go to my seat. They had to take me there. And somebody always used to come and take me wherever I wanted to be.

And on Friday night I went to the Yeshurun shul and Saturday morning I went to the Haychal Shlomo and there they gave me the honour of reading the haftorah of the week and afterwards they told me that there were 600 people in shul. I didn't know it at the time, I would have been nervous. And the next day they took me to the president of Israel, that at that time was Chaim Herzog, and the next day they again took me for a drive.

Then they also brought me to the rabbinate. They were having a meeting, the Beth Din, and they introduced me to the rabbis and I stayed there for a few days and then I came back. Mr Marcus went away, he had to (go) somewhere else, so I came back on my own and my niece met me at the airport in Joburg and she put me on a plane and I went to Cape Town and Mr Marcus came to meet me at the airport.

I met many people whom I knew and people were extremely nice. Many of them invited me to tea and to meals and they were very, very friendly. Everybody whom I knew, some people phoned me, I didn't even know that they are in Israel. Some people I phoned whom I heard they were in Israel and everybody was friendly and everybody was pleased that I came to visit Erez Yisrael.

*[About travelling as a blind person]* Well I don't know. Once you are on an airplane you just sit there, but you get a thrill when they announced that you are near Israel. Then you sort of feel very uplifted. You feel that you have achieved something in life. That G-d has helped me to come to our own country. It makes you feel extremely happy.

#### RELATIONSHIP WITH G-D

I was always grateful for the fact that G-d gave me a memory that I could conduct services and that I could teach children and that I could be in touch with children and that I have been invited to affairs throughout my life. In fact I am invited to a golden wedding on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August and they want me to speak at the wedding because I was present when Lenny Pinn married Marsha Kassel 50 years ago, so he said he wants me to come to the golden wedding on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August and say a few years.

#### THE APPLES AND PEARS JOKE

Last week I was really honoured as well. Rabbi Apple, the Chief Rabbi of Australia came to visit the home and while he was speaking Mr Bloch, who is in charge of the Shul here, came to ask me to propose a vote of thanks to the Rabbi. Now it so happened that the Rabbi spoke about memories, that was my subject. He said that parents should tell their

children and grandchildren their life story so that they can remember it. So I told him that I had to do everything by memory and I made a little joke I said, 'Your name is Rabbi Apple but in reality I feel that you and your good lady are a lovely pear.'

#### HOW DOES HE FEEL ABOUT SHARING HIS STORY

It gives me pleasure to think that not having my sight, people take an interest in me and that people are nice to me because they could have just left me and they could have said 'Well he is a blind person' and that's all, but they didn't do it. They took an interest in me wherever I've been. I've been in Oudtshoorn for 15 years. I was unmarried at the time and they used to invite me to all the simchas and they used to sometimes ask me to speak and even if they didn't I didn't mind either. But they were very nice to me and people in general treated me very well.

#### REFLECTING ON HIS LIFE

I had disappointments in life, as nobody can always have everything you expect. But I never expected things that I could do. I tried not to trouble people. As much as possible I tried to do whatever I could. The things that I couldn't do I had to ask others, but I tried to help myself, to support myself and to look after myself the best way that I could. More than that I couldn't do.

#### HIS DAILY LIFE AT HIGHLANDS HOUSE TODAY

At the home in the morning my companion Nellie comes here. She washes me and dresses me and then I go down for breakfast and then after breakfast I go to they call it 'The Tea Room' here. Then I sometimes have music, then I listen and a little later Nellie brings me back to the room and she puts on a tape for me and I listen and before 12 we go for lunch and after lunch I've got a rocking chair here, the school gave me this rocking chair as present when I retired in 1989, then I sit in the rocking chair till about 2 o'clock or a little after 2. Then Nellie brings me some tea and I have some fruit and then Nellie takes me for a walk and I sit in the foyer or outside and sometimes people see me, they come and say hello to me. Some visitors who come to see their relations they know me and they see me. They come up and they say hello. And then I come back again, we have supper half past four. Then about 6 o'clock Nellie puts me to bed again because I don't want to sit in the wheelchair till late. I don't want the nurses to put me to bed late because if I sit in the wheelchair till late then I'll fall asleep and then I won't be able to sleep at night. So some nights I sleep well, some nights I don't.

I've got to accept life. I am not young anymore. And I've got to be grateful for the time that I could do things. And I've got to thank the Almighty that I had the opportunity of doing whatever I did.

*[Lisa asks how old he is]* I'm 90.

I go there *[to the shul at Highlands House]* on Friday night and Saturday morning. But then they've got people, volunteers who enjoy coming to the home and conducting the

service and I don't want to take it away from them. So I don't do the service any more. But on a few occasions they gave me the honour of reading the maftir of the week. Now when I feel I can still concentrate on it then I take it. If I am in doubt then I don't take it because I don't know whether I have the same concentrating power that I had when I was younger and I don't want to take a risk. Last week I did a maftir here. I felt I could concentrate on it and then on the shabbat before Tisha B'Av is the different tune, Shabbat Chazon, and they want me to do it again. So please G-d I suppose I'll do it again.

WHAT WOULD YOU WANT TO SAY TO THE PEOPLE WHO WATCH THIS VIDEO ?

I want to thank them very much and I want to tell them that I believe that there is no such a thing as darkness in the world. There is light, but you have got to look for it and you've got to search and you've got to do everything in your power to bring happiness to humanity. That should be your aim in life.

ENDS



