

## **MEMORIES ABOUT CANTOR IMMERMAN BY MORRIS MARCUS**

[Israel, 4/8/17]

I am penning some incidents of the life of my dear friend Abraham Ben Abraham, who came forth on the fourth of the fourth, that are not common knowledge, but that I remember vividly and should be known.

### **His 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Trip To Israel [His first trip ever to the holy land]**

On landing at Ben-Gurion airport on Sunday morning he kissed the ground with tears of joy. That afternoon at Beit Protea in Herzlia 300 South Africans from all over Israel came to welcome and greet him. He recognized them all by voice and name and told them associations and Bar-Mitzvah portions.

### **His Maftir at Heichal Shlomo**

There wasn't a dry eye among the 600 worshipers. In walks a blind man to the most prestigious shul in Israel and delivers a maftir as only Abe could do with his beautiful voice and perfect diction. He was applauded and literally carried off the bimah.

### **President Clinton Visits South Africa**

During President Clinton's visit to South Africa, I met one of his press secretaries – Arthur E. Green of Washington DC - at a function. I asked him in passing if he knew the day he was born. He was amazed at the question and answered that he always wanted to know. I told him about the blind chazzan. He asked me to call him on Monday morning at 7am to try and fit him. I did that and he asked me to pick him up at 8:30, and said that he had only 30 minutes to spare. I picked Mr. & Mrs. Green up at the correct time and took them to Highlands House where Abe was recuperating from his operation. Abe was honoured by their visit and asked about the president. He then asked Mr Green what date he was born and then touched his fingertips and exclaimed Thursday. He also calculated Mrs Green's birthday. The Greens were so taken up with this phenomenal man that they spent nearly two hours with him questioning and listening to his story.

### **His Humour**

Rev Abraham had a unique sense of humour. The best story that he loved to tell was when he lived in Zastron. A reverend used to teach several times a week and Abe absorbed and memorized it all. When it came to question time he would always be first with answers. These actions annoyed the other cheder pupils so much that the teacher turned to Abe and said "ghaap nit", "ghaap nit". This led

to him being called Ghaap Nit – a title he enjoyed – for the rest of his stay in Zastron.

He also loved to pun and these were some of his classics:

“Did you know that there was a Jewish family in the north pole? They were the Icebergs, Gods frozen people”

On reading Parashat Paran – “The heifer was highly educated. It was well red.”

On the telephone maftir – it starts with “hulo”

He used to tell people that his kippah was his “handy cap”

He used to say, “What’s a kichel? – a herring aid”

When invited to a function he’d say, “ I’d love to come. What time will I see you?”

### **His Latter Life**

After recovering from his first fall I managed to acquire for him the flat opposite Marais Road Shul. The flat was renovated by the Bar-Kochva Lodge of the Bnai Brith. The late Norman Isaacson, the ever-busy and amazing shamash of the shul, then took control of Abe. He would fetch him for prayers and functions and shiyurim at shul which made him very happy. Unfortunately Abe fell again and after discharge from hospital he came back to Highlands House.

### **His Unshaken Faith**

Often in our long association I would get a call from him asking me if I was going to attend a funeral at Pinelands and if I could take him with me. I would pick him up and the procedure was always the same. As we were driving away, he would say “Reb Moishe”

And I would say, “Reb Avraham”

“Reb Moishe people die nowadays who never died before” and an impish smile would appear on his face as if he’s expounded something profound. Further on he would say “Reb Moishe”

And I would reply, “Yes, Reb Avraham.”

“Reb Moishe, people are dying to come to Pinelands.” And again the impish smile would appear. Then, as we approached Pinelands his demeanour would change.

“Reb Moishe,” he would say,

“Yes, Reb Avraham,” I would reply

“You go to Johannesburg and come back.”

“Yes, Reb Avraham”

“You go to Israel and come back”

“Yes, Reb Avraham”

“Reb Moishe, you go to Oudtshoorn and come back”

“Yes, Reb Avraham”

“But people who go to Pinelands never come back. Why?”

“Why Reb Avraham?”

Then his face would turn angelic and he would say, “Because it must be good up there in the hands of God.”

That was the creed by which he lived. May his memory be a blessing to us all.

He passed away on the Sunday after celebrating his third barmitzvah on Shabbat at Highlands House shul.

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