

From Vishtinetz, Lithuania, in 1913 we escaped persecution to South Africa.
From South Africa we scattered all over the world.

The Mierowsky Family

This is our story of education and creativity, of kindness and compassion,
of humour, and a deep love of humanity and mishpachah.



DAVID MIEROWSKY
01-01



DORA {MIEROWSKY} BERKOWITZ
01-02



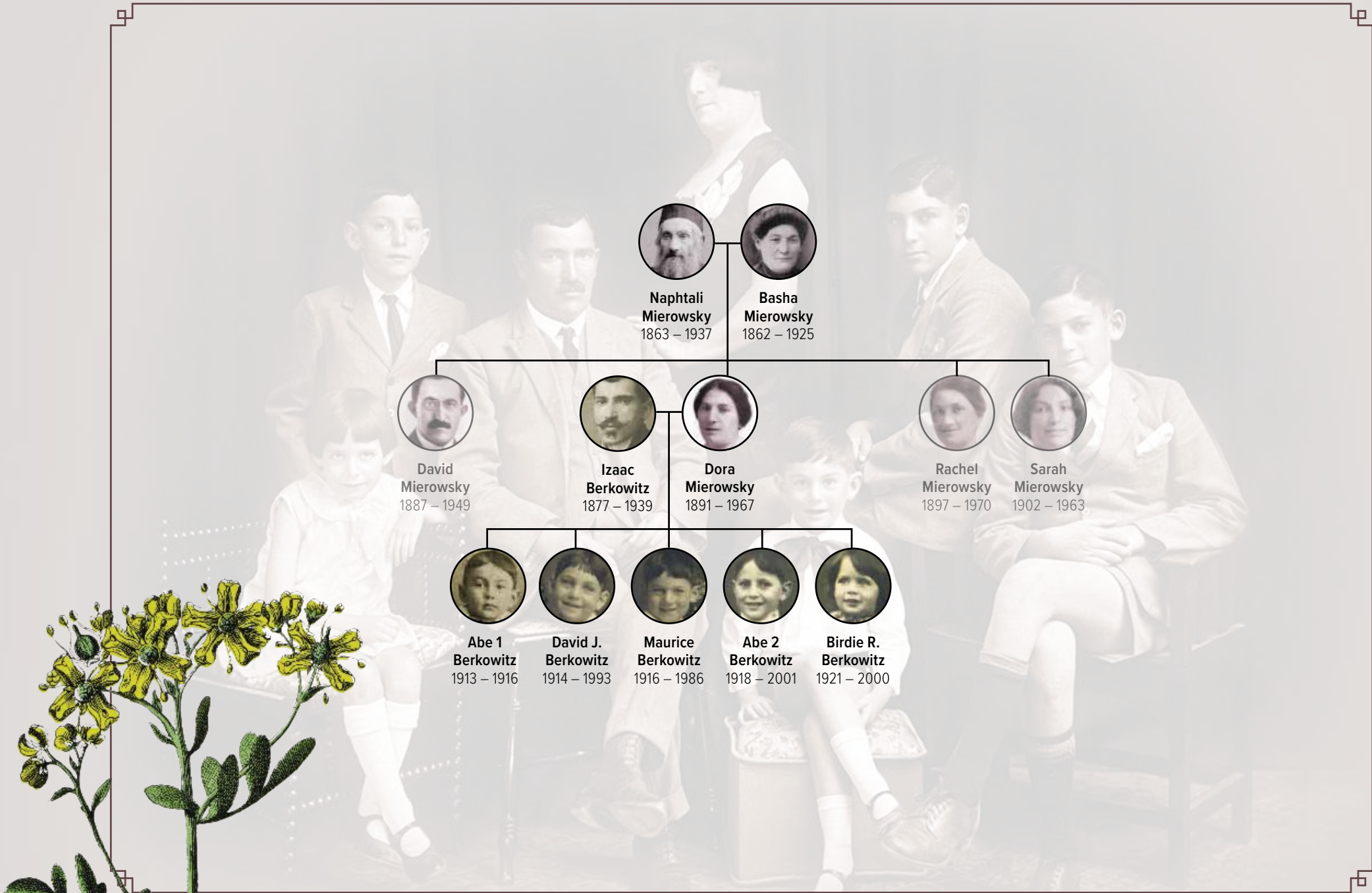
NAPHTALI & BASHA MIEROWSKY
01



SARAH {MIEROWSKY} LICHTER
01-03



RACHEL {MIEROWSKY} NURICK
01-04





GRADOCK SYNAGOGUE HALL
BUILDER'S COMMITTEE
FOUNDATION MEMBERS

GENERAL I.B. BAZAAR DEALER

DORA

DOCTOR GARTH

My Recollections



A LETTER WRITTEN
TO IRENE
by
Late Abe
Berkowitz
01-02-03

HEREWITH A HUMBLE OFFERING
OF A FEW MEMORIES EVOKED
BY THE NAME OF CRADOCK.

I fully sympathize Irene with your desire to
probe into the earlier years of the past few
generations.

I too would have loved to find out more
about life in the old country prior to their
emigration to South Africa, but alas “Sic
Transit Gloria Mundi”.¹

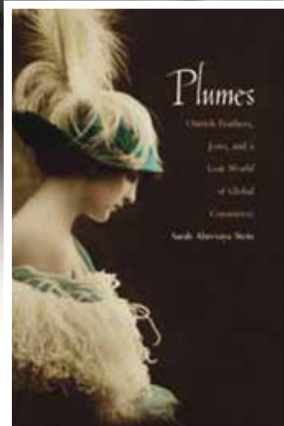
In 1913, the family Berkowitz set sail from a
port in Northern Europe to start a new life in
South Africa.

The group consisted of a married couple
Isaac Berkowitz, wife Dora (nee Mierowsky)
and baby boy Abe. Also with them was Dora’s
mother (grandma Basha Mierowsky) and
her son David Mierowsky and unmarried
daughters Sarah and Rachel.

The ship arrived in Cape Town and
continued onto Mossel Bay where they
disembarked on September 29th, 2013.
The party then travelled to Oudtshoorn
where Dora’s father Naphtali Mierowsky
(grandfather, usually referred to as “Zeida”,
husband of Basha, usually referred to as
“Bobba”) were living.



¹ “SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI” (SOMETIMES SHORTENED TO STGM) IS A LATIN PHRASE THAT MEANS “THIS TOO SHALL PASS.”



LEFT: BOOK CALLED PLUMES
OSTRICH FEATHERS, JEWS, AND A
LOST WORLD OF GLOBAL COMMERCE
BY SARAH ABREVAYA STEIN

The thirst for exotic ornament among fashionable women in the metropolises of Europe and America prompted a bustling global trade in ostrich feathers that flourished from the 1880s until the First World War. When feathers fell out of fashion with consumers, the result was an economic catastrophe for many, a worldwide feather bust.

www.jewishbookcouncil.org



CAPTION PLEASE



CAPTION PLEASE

Oudtshoorn was the centre of a flourishing trade in ostrich feathers (an important component in those days of fashionable women's clothes) and a large number of Jewish emigrants from Russia, Latvia and Lithuania were drawn to the area by prospects of participating in the "feather boom". (In due course the feather industry collapsed because it was founded on the notoriously fickle women's fashion trade).

Three children were born in Oudtshoorn to the Berkowitz family: David, Maurice (Maish)

and Abe. Now you may wonder why a child Abe was born in Oudtshoorn when a child Abe had already been born in Europe and who had emigrated to South Africa.

The reason is that my parents first-born child Abe unfortunately did not survive. Those were the days before antibiotics and he died of pneumonia aged about five. When therefore, when it came the third child to be born in South Africa came to be named, the name of Abe was given in memory of the deceased brother.

When Abe was a few months old the Berkowitz family moved to Cradock, a smaller town than Oudtshoorn. Cradock is about 150 miles from Port Elizabeth, one of the major ports of South Africa. Cradock is a rather arid region and is an important sheep farming center, rather desert-like with low 'karoo' bushes that survive in the dry conditions- very hot in summer and freezing in winter. The night skies are magnificent.



AN EXAMPLE OF THE "FAMOUS" SWEET CASE THAT ALL THE CHILDREN RECALL THAT SAT ON THE COUNTER OF I.B. BAZAAR. IN THOSE DAYS IT WAS FILLED WITH ALL THE NAUGHTY STUFF US SWEET TOOTH CHILDREN COULD DREAM OF!



THE JEW'S HARP IS A SMALL MUSICAL INSTRUMENT WHICH IS HELD AGAINST THE TEETH OR LIPS, AND PLUCKED WITH THE FINGERS.

called "Jews Harp".



The next baby to arrive was named Birdie (from the Yiddish name "Faiga" meaning "bird" in memory of Isaac's mother. Birdie's position in the family was that of a typical lil' sister. When we went to shul on Saturday morning we had to take her along much to our annoyance.

I still have vivid memories of her walking with us in winter with her hands in a muff. When Birdie reached school-going age arrangements had to be made for her to be transported to school. The

school was too far for her to walk so it was arranged that she would be picked up every school morning by a horse-drawn cab (known in England as a Hansom cab).

My father Isaac Berkowitz established a business in Cradock called a 'general dealer's store' stocking groceries, men's clothing and a miscellany of items of use to the farming community. The family business in the latter years was re-named I.B. Bazaar. The shop was relocated to a site very close to the west bank of the river that runs through the town of Cradock. (Known as the 'Great Fish River'.)

Of special interest to us was the stock of sweets and a large glass case containing ornaments and little musical instruments

The cab was driven by Mr. Marais and Birdie and a few other children from the neighborhood would sit in the cab like her Majesty the Queen.

Birdie had a few friends from among the Jewish families of Cradock – Miriam and Ruth Perl, Zelda Levenstein and some non-Jewish girls – Etta from across the road.

There was at that time a fairly large Jewish community about 30 families with their own synagogue and a full time reverend, but at present there are no Jewish families. We had a happy childhood in Cradock. We would help our parents in their business and at home.

Our parents and grandparents generally spoke Yiddish among themselves and to the children. The children would always respond in English but we understood Yiddish perfectly. Yiddish was the "lingua franca" of the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and Central Europe. It is substantially a dialect of German with a significant proportion of Hebrew incorporated. Written Yiddish utilizes Hebrew characters.

There were very limited facilities for organized entertainment of children. There were two cinemas. Tickets 4 cents and some sporting activities but we had to rely on our own ingenuity regarding leisure activity.

There is a rock formation – an outcrop on the outskirts of town which had just the right profile to be used as a kind of tobogganing slope – obviously in the dry conditions because it never snows in Cradock. The problem was that after a few runs down the slope the trousers would

be worn through so we had to slide down on a base of thick cardboard or even flat sheets of metal from old cans.

There were no electronic toys; in fact the electron itself was discovered by J.J. Thomson in 1897, just 21 years before I was born.

I remember being taken by my father, Isaac, in the year about 1924 to attend a demonstration of the first radio broadcast transmitted by the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Of course television had not been dreamed about.

There are no facilities in Cradock for higher education so that any pupil graduating from school has to go to one of the bigger cities, notably Johannesburg or Cape Town. David and Abe and Birdie attended the University in Johannesburg.

Dora, Isaac, Maish all continued to live out their lives in Cradock and no members of the family remain living there. Our grandparents Naphtali and Basha lived with our family in our home in Cradock.



RECALLED BY
**Irene
Jacobson**
01-02-05-01

THREE PERFECT CHARLES ATLAS DEMONSTRATIONS

Charles Atlas was a famous bodybuilder and his ads for bodybuilding equipment were on the back pages of all the magazines in the 1930's.

One time David, Maish and Abe decided to order a piece of chest muscle building equipment called a "bullwork". It consisted of two handles held together by one, two, or three steel springs. By opening and closing the handles and using the power of the springs, one built up chest muscles.



The piece of equipment arrived, the three boys tried to use it but couldn't work it and declared to their mother Dora, that it was broken. Dora picked it up, gave two or three perfect demonstrations and told them there was nothing wrong with it!



CAPTION PLEASE





RECALLED BY
**Late Ivan
Lichter**
04-01

UNCLE ITCHIE GAVE ME MY FIRST PAIR OF LONG TROUSERS

Uncle Itchie ran a 'general store' where you could buy a spade, flour, matches and a wide variety of other items. Unfortunately few people did. Like most of the rest of our family on both sides, he was no businessman.

So Auntie Dora took things into her own capable hands. She set up her own general store with more saleable stock, leaving Uncle Itchie to pursue his business as before. As I see it, this allowed him to maintain his dignity and at the same time give her a free hand. He was a charming good-natured man with a ready smile. It was he who recognized my natural wish to be grown up and presented me with my first pair of long trousers—whites.



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RECALLED BY
**Irene
Jacobson**
01-02-05-01

AUNTY DORA'S BAGELS

During my university years I used to spend vacations at home. Travel was by train and aunt Dora would meet me at Cradock railway station when I passed through there on my way to and from PE.

On the return journey, the train passed through Cradock at 11 pm and she would always be there with tins of beignets and chocolate cake.



CAPTION PLEASE

Bobba Dora was the Matriarch



WRITTEN BY
**Irene
Albert Jacobson**
01-02-05-01

OUR GRANDMOTHER DEVORAH LEAH, ALWAYS CALLED DORA, WAS THE FAMILY MATRIARCH.

She ruled the family with her wisdom and street smarts. It is telling that Naphtali and Basha chose to live with her out of all their children.

I remember her as kind and loving but no nonsense. When I think back on what she had to deal with in her earlier years, I understand her pragmatism, drive, hard work and lack of frivolity with us.

She endured leaving her birthplace, coming to an unknown country, learning English, the loss of a four year old child and the early death of her beloved husband. She always wore dresses that were black, brown, grey, dark blue and olive green with little patterns on them.

Her hair was cut in her characteristic severe style by a barber. It is hard to see her as the glamorous young mother with a hat in a photo taken in 1916.

During our vacations in Cradock we only saw her at lunch and in the evening as she went to the shop during the day. I never saw her cook but the table was always filled with meat and vegetables for lunch and dinner and the best bagels and babke (cinnamon rolls) ever. There



RECALLED BY
**Irene
Jacobson**
01-02-05-01

DORA THE MIKVEH REBEL ...

Dora was a rebel and did not want to marry Isaac who was many years older than her and did not want to go to the mikvah before her wedding. She had no choice and ended up doing both.



Design and Text on this
page still to be completed.
Images are final



RECALLED BY
**Late Ivan
Lichter**
04-01

UNCLE ITCHIE VOWED TO MARRY AUNTY DORA

During my visits to Cradock I came to know not only Uncle Itchie and Aunt Dora but also my grandfather Naphtali.

I understand Uncle Itchie first saw Aunt Dora when he was grown up and she was in her early teens and that he vowed he was going to marry her. They finally settled in Cradock and raised their family there.

Their first child died, I think, during the 1918 influenza epidemic. His name was Abe, and as I was the next male child to be born into the family I took his name, one I later dropped when I changed my name.



were always different flavored jellies, vanilla, chocolate, butterscotch, sago and tapioca puddings for meals. Each was served in a metal mini mold that was never unmolded. I only saw her eat the chicken necks and soup bones from the soup.

My first try at baking, using Dora's recipe was a disaster as I made the dough early evening, left it overnight as instructed and found an alcoholic mess overtaking the kitchen the next morning. I realized that Dora was an insomniac and cooked at night, had a couple of hours sleep, then went back to the kitchen in the early hours of the morning to finish her baking. We were then greeted with warm bagels left out for breakfast as she was already at work.

Dora came to Port Elizabeth a couple of times a year to order goods for the shop. When she went to the commercial travellers, Birdie would go with her and also pick out clothes for me and my sister. When the items came, if they did not fit or we didn't like them they were sent to the store to be sold. I did not go into a store to try on clothes until my late teen years. Every few months we received boxes of canned goods such as fish, fruit, vegetables, soup and jam as well

as toilet paper and cleaning supplies from the wholesaler that she did business with. We spent the afternoon unpacking the boxes into a cupboard. A Costco closet before it's time. Ivor also remembers the crates of groceries being delivered to their home in Johannesburg.

When we visited Cradock Dora always used the small back bedroom. At the bottom of the wardrobe was a large carpetbag. It was filled with jellies and puddings when she visited us, loose change when in Cradock. From this bag she used to give us "two and six" (25c) each Wednesday and Saturday afternoon to go to the movies. The seats cost sixpence (5), or a ticky (2.5c) if you sat on the stairs, and she let you keep the change. I spent my extra money on comics at White and Boughton, the newsagent.

Granny Dora loved reading Mills and Boone doctor-nurse romances. Birdie would borrow five or six from the lending library at Garlick's, the PE department store, wrap them up in brown paper and string and send them to Cradock. They would be returned a week later. Almost every second day a letter would arrive written in Yiddish, in Hebrew script, containing all the news about the

family. Birdie would read it aloud and that's how we learnt Yiddish.

Dora was an excellent business woman and ran a tight ship. She was also very generous. She managed to send her children to University as well as help her nephews, nieces and even grandchildren pursue their academic dreams. As she held the purse strings, she was probably the driving force for some of her nephews becoming doctors. I am sure she gave her opinions to her sisters and they went along with her suggestions. Dora kept the family together and the photos show how, in spite of working hard, she still managed to go to family simchas and even smile

Three smells make me think of Dora. The smell of freshly baked yeast bread and cakes, the eucalyptus of the Airwick air freshener in the bathroom in Cradock and the smell of her face powder when she hugged and kissed us. I am grateful for the educational and other opportunities she gave to all the family as it helped us become who we are today.



Photoshop work still to be
completed on this page.
Image final



THE WHOLE FAMILY CAME TO CRADOCK CAME TO MEET BARBI WHO WAS THE VERY FIRST BABY BORN (AND THE OLDEST) OF GENERATION 5 (G5)!

L-R BACK ROW: BERNARD MIEROWSKY, BETTY GOLDMAN, DAVID BERKOWITZ, LIONEL HORWITZ, ARNOLD GOLDMAN, LESLIE BERKOWITZ, MARGOT MIEROWSKY, IVAN BERKOWITZ, YVONNE HORWITZ, BIRDIE ALBERT

L-R MIDDLE ROW: IRENE ALBERT, LINKY BERKOWITZ, RAE BERKOWITZ, SONIA SHAKINOVSKY HOLDING BARBI HORWITZ, DORA BERKOWITZ, MAISH BERKOWITZ

L-R FRONT ROW: SANDRA BERKOWITZ, SHARON BERKOWITZ, SHARON ALBERT, VIVIENNE MIEROWSKY, DAVID ALBERT, LISA GOLDMAN, PAMELA BERKOWITZ, PHILIP GOLDMAN, MICHAEL GOLDMAN

PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN BY PUFFY ALBERT

I Kept Granny Dora Company



WRITTEN BY
**Leslie
Berkowitz**
01-02-03-03

AS MY GRANNY DORA LIVED ALONE, I SLEPT AT HER HOUSE IN THE EVENINGS TO KEEP HER COMPANY. Dora used to have a bath as soon as they all arrived home from the shop after closing at 17:00h. She had her supper and was in bed by six thirty reading her Mills and Boon books which she called her ‘Doctor/Nurse books.’



When I, cheekily, criticised her for reading such junk, she responded by putting me in my place, telling me that she had read all of the Russian classics written by Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Pushkin while still at school and had no need to be doing it again!

The doors in the house had glass panels in the upper half. I could wake up at any hour and see Dor’s light was on and that she was reading. She got up every weekday at 5 a.m. and walked across town to open

and clean the shop so that it was ready by 8 a.m.

Dark chocolate was kept in the top drawer of her dressing table and I would love to go and help myself. Also in that drawer was her face powder which lent its unique smell to everything in the drawer as well as the chocolate! I can still smell it today. In the drawer was also a large collection of tickeys, three penny pieces, which was the cost of a phone call. Every time I went back to varsity, I would ask Granny

if I could take them for phone calls (no cell phones at that time!). Needless to say, I could have whatever I wanted.

A highlight of my life growing up was the arrival, every July, of my aunts, uncles and cousins from all over the country to spend the winter holiday in the family hometown of Cradock. My parents' home as well as Dora's was chockfull of visitors and the overflow stayed in the Masonic Hotel which belonged to my godparents.

Dora produced prodigious amounts of food and the tables groaned. Sweets and biltong were in never ending supply. She had two pantries in her house and they were always filled with delights including her famous and best-in-the-world taiglach, mostly filled with syrup, walnuts and sultanas. Everyone in the family would carefully shake each taigel to ensure that it was a full one. If it rattled with the sound of the nut lying free inside, it was second rate and promptly returned to the plate and the next one tested! That sensation of syrup running down one's chin after the first bite can never be forgotten once experienced! After Granny Dora died, my mother was able to keep up the tradition

of the taiglach which would arrive every Yom Tov in the post.

Another highlight of my early years growing up in Cradock were the bagels and bulkes which Granny Dora baked alternately every Sunday and gave to my parents for breakfast in bed. I will never forget waking up at 3 or 4 on a Sunday morning to the heavenly smell of the baking coming from Granny Dora's kitchen. Why 3 or 4 a.m.? Dora was a very poor sleeper and suffered from bad insomnia most of her adult life.

When Ivan stayed with Dora, he would come home from sports practices and have supper with her at six o'clock then would get up from Granny's supper table and come to our kitchen where he would have a second supper with us! Despite that, he was as thin as a rake and, at six feet four inches tall, he was like a long piece of spaghetti!



RECALLED BY
**Late Ivan
Lichter**
04-01

AUNTY DORA'S BAGELS

I was very close to my cousins, David, Maish, Abe and Birdie. David and Abe were high academic achievers, matriculating with straight A's. There was only four months difference in age between Abe and myself and we spent a great deal of time together.

During my university years I used to spend vacations at home. Travel was by train and aunt Dora would meet me at Cradock railway station when I passed through there on my way to and from Port Elizabeth. On the return journey, the train passed through Cradock at 11 pm and she would always be there with a tin of beigels and chocolate cake.

Winter Holiday Visits to Cradock



WRITTEN BY
**Ivor
Berkowitz**
01-02-04-01

THE EXCITEMENT OF THE UPCOMING TRIP WOULD SWELL OVER THE WEEK OR TWO BEFORE OUR DEPARTURE. We planned our packing, our mother Valerie prepared a picnic basket with egg salad sandwiches, and cold chicken and we boarded the train on a Saturday, departure time 2.00 p.m. to arrive in Cradock at 9.00 a.m. the next day. The ritual was fixed. We rushed into our compartment.

Frank and I and in the later years Louise, would argue, negotiate and fight, over who would sleep on the top bunks. The middle and the bottom ones were to be avoided – not enough space to sit up without hitting your head on the bunk above you. I remember the layout of the compartment – the green leather bunks, the metallic washbasin and the pull down varnished table secured to the wall with a thick shiny metal clip. Two o’ clock sharp the whistle sounded and slowly we chugged away with the hiss of the old steam engine.

Sleeping in the train, a great adventure, was preceded by the porter rolling out the bedding rolls – sheets, pillows and royal blue blankets and then dozing off to the clickety clack sound of the of the steel wheels over the rail cracks watching the stars moving by across the black Free State sky.

At 9:00 a.m. as we approached the station we would see Uncle Maish in the distance waiting for us on the platform. Then the drive through



Photoshop work on
this image still to be
completed

the town, up the hill to the house on the corner with the curved red polished front stairs – Uncle Maish’s and Auntie Rae’s house next to Granny Dora’s house – an opening in the separating fence – two houses but one wonderful family. That is surely how it felt.

The feeling of being loved was all pervasive during our stays. Granny would embrace us with her big hugs – I can still recall her baby powder scent.

The Berkowitz’s were often in Cradock together with the Alberts, Aunty Birdie and the children joining up with Rae, Maish, Ivan, Yvonne, Leslie and Pamela. One big Berkowitz/Albert family – a raucous group so different from our quiet little Johannesburg clan. I loved the noise, the business and the closeness of our family, our granny, uncles, aunts and cousins. We had a basic daily routine. We awoke in the morning, had our breakfast. Granny Dora left around 6 a.m., before sunrise, while we were still asleep, picked up by a taxi cab to open up the shop – a general dealer with groceries and family outfitting supplies – to start preparing orders for delivery later that day. We walked down to the shop in the mornings. It seemed a long way but it was probably only a mile or so down the hill with the kopje on the left, past Leslie’s friend Cedric Bergman’s house, through the commercial downtown, past the magnificent church and finally to arrive at I.B. Bazaar on the bank of the Great Fish River with its tiny trickle of water.

I can still picture Uncle Maish and Granny behind the counter making up orders to be delivered. Our magnet, however, was the



MAISH BERKOWITZ
01-02-03

ABE1 BERKOWITZ
01-02-01

ABE2 BERKOWITZ
01-02-04

DAVID BERKOWITZ
01-02-02

BASIL MIEROWSKY
01-01-02

MARCELLE {MIEROWSKY} KOHN
01-01-03

BIRDIE {BERKOWITZ} ALBERT
01-02-05

ROSE {LICHTER} MIRKIN
01-03-02

IVAN LICHTER
01-03-01

IVAN NURICK
01-04-02

BETTY {NURICK} GOLDMAN
01-04-01

BERNARD MIEROWSKY
01-01-01