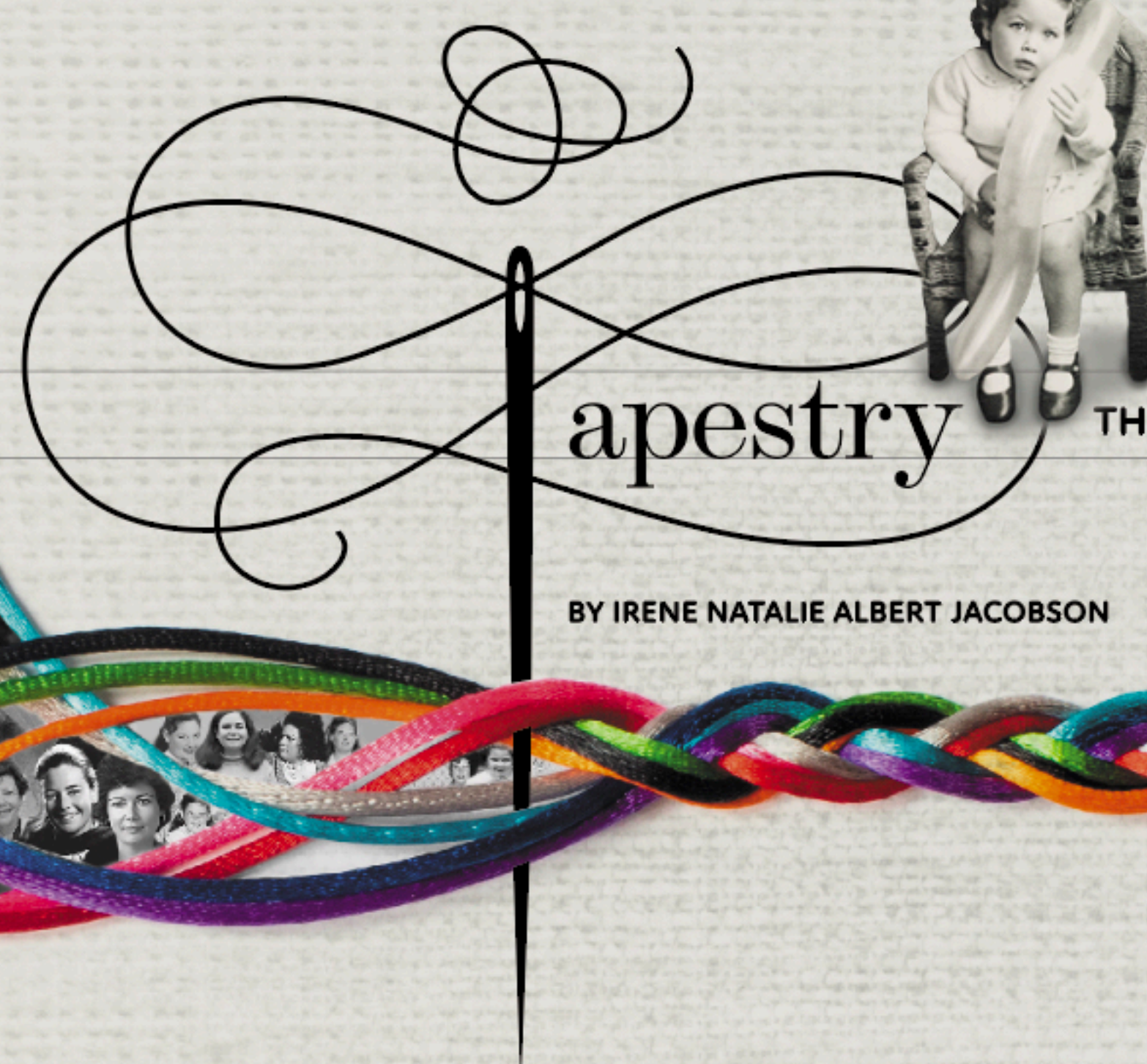




apestry

THE THREADS OF MY LIFE

BY IRENE NATALIE ALBERT JACOBSON





From the Desk of
Irene Natalie

Dear Family Members and Readers,

Please remember that this is a book of my memories and thoughts that came to me. It is not comprehensive as I am always thinking of new stories, memories and anecdotes but as my days get shorter it is a start.

Memories are people's recollections about events in their lives and the telling of stories they may have heard that were passed down from generation to generation. Memories of the same events can differ from person to person. We all know that people can remember situations and conversations differently. These are my recollections of my memories at the time of writing.

With the memory of Birdie, the grammar nazi, with her constant corrections, I apologize for any typos, misspells and grammatical errors.

Enjoy your read!

Irene Natalie Albert Jordan



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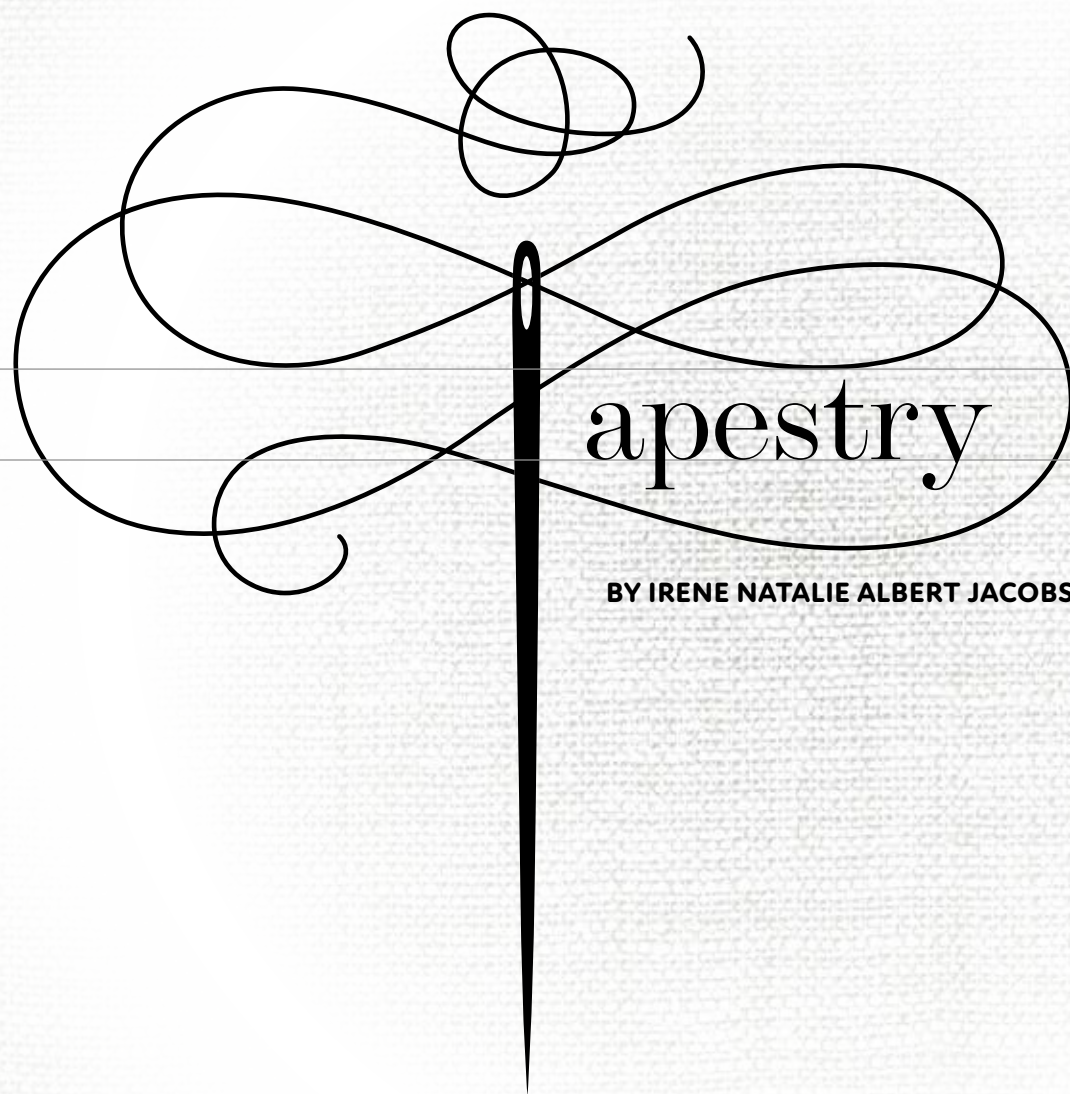
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apetry

THE THREADS OF MY LIFE

BY IRENE NATALIE ALBERT JACOBSON

TAPESTRY

*My life has been a tapestry, of rich and royal hue
An everlasting vision, of the ever-changing view
A wond'rous woven magic, in bits of blue and gold
A tapestry to feel and see, impossible to hold*

LYRICS BY CAROLE KING



Meal Times Were Sacred

GROWING UP IN SOUTH AFRICA WE USED TO LISTEN TO ADULT CONVERSATION ALL THE TIME. Everyone sat around the table and talked and no one was excused in the middle of a meal. If one's friends visited the same rule applied and when we visited them at meal times there were the same expectations.

This is how we learned all about the world around us. No TV, and very little radio except for suitable children's programs which were few and far between. No cell phones and no computers, no books on Kindle and no ordering anything on Amazon.

Our grandparents were spoken about but as we saw them maybe once a year we didn't have a deep relationship with them. Calling long distance on the telephone

was very expensive and it was usually kept for unpleasant news. The highlight of my mother's day was when she received the letters her mother and mother-in-law wrote at least once a week. Granny Rosa's letters were full of the goings on in East London, were written in English and spoke about all the charitable work she did and what the nine grandchildren in East London were doing. Granny Dora's letters were full of what was happening in

the store, what her sons were doing, what her brother and sisters families were doing and about the different grandchildren. Her letters were written in Yiddish, using Hebrew letters. Both letters were read out loud at meal times and that is how we learned Yiddish and how we knew what was going on in the different families.

The world was discussed at mealtimes in our family but very rarely South African



1959 | PORT ELIZABETH | IRENE'S BAT MITZVAH

BACK: Puffy, Irene, David

FRONT: Birdie, Sharon

politics and never the old-world countries our grandparents came from. The only time I heard about anyone growing up or the world they left behind was from my Granny Rosa who was born in Kimberly. Our family had no close relatives living in town except for Birdie's cousin Rose Lichter Mirkin. They had a lot of family in PE so we saw them on the holidays, along with all their Mirkin family.

Most of the time we celebrated our holidays with the Budlender, Strelitz, and Weinberg clan. Bernard and Margot Mierowsky came to live in Port Elizabeth when I was about ten and they

were soon included in the family events. With no close family, we made our own customs and traditions and had no idea how it was done in the old country.

Moving to America made me realize how little I knew about my grandparents and their families, how they felt about going to a new country and how they felt knowing they would never see their parents and siblings again. How did they feel never being able to see them except in photographs and never hearing their voices?

Here is my contribution to hearing your ancestor's voices and my story on how we navigated through life.

WHAT IS THE WARP?

The warp is the lengthwise longitudinal threads on the fabric loom.

These threads are held stationary.

The warp threads are the support network for the weft.

WHAT IS THE WEFT?

The weft is the horizontal thread.

They are threaded over and under the warp threads.

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My Mother, Birdie Rose Berkowitz

MY MOTHER WAS BORN IN CRADOCK, EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA ON OCTOBER 8, 1921. A GIRL AFTER FIVE BOYS. She was called Baba by her brothers who all doted on her. Her name was a direct translation of Tzipporah Shoshanah, her Hebrew name. I never discovered whom she was named after. For her childhood and growing up in Cradock read the Mierowsky Family book.

My mother was engaged to a Rhodesian farmer when she met my father. She must have met Puffy on the beach in Port Elizabeth (PE) as she used to spend her vacations with her cousin Rose. They never told any stories except that my Granny Dora was upset that she married an “English” Jew as opposed to a

Lithuanian one. I do know that my father used to borrow a car to take her out and that he had a dog, Hondkos (Dog Food in Afrikaans), which Birdie did not like. When she complained about the dog he told her she could leave so she quickly changed her attitude. The wedding was held in PE, September 19, 1945, with a



1944 | PORT ELIZABETH

Birdie, Puffy, Rose and Hondkos (front)





SEPTEMBER 19, 1945 | PORT ELIZABETH

birdie and puffy arriving at their wedding reception at the Mill Park Bowling Club

reception at the Mill Park Bowling Club which is at the bottom of Westview Drive but at that time on the outskirts of the town. Other than that, I have no idea about their early lives in Port Elizabeth, except that they lived at the Palmerston Hotel for the first few months of their marriage, then in an apartment on Westbourne Road until the house was built at 74 Westview Drive when I was about 18 months. Birdie did work for a year at Greenbushes, at a farm school which she hated. She said the students were ungrateful and complained if she did anything nice for them. She used to ride with the milk truck in the morning and come home on a little train in the afternoon.

Birdie did a lot of volunteer work for different organizations. That is how our mothers spent their time. They belonged to the Zionist League which is an organization which raises funds for Israel and the Union of Jewish Women which raises funds for social welfare in South Africa. The Union, UJW, was the organization that started nursery schools in South Africa and that raised money for feeding black children in schools, teaching black adults to read and other such social works. Birdie also used to support and collect for the JNF, the Jewish National Fund, Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael. Remember Israel only came into existence after I was born. One of the groups Birdie belonged to was the Ora Group, a women's adult education group. They met every second week, had a guest speaker and one of the members gave a short talk on some topic of Jewish interest and then they had tea.



1949 | 74 WESTVIEW DRIVE
Puffy and Birdie's newly built house in p.e.



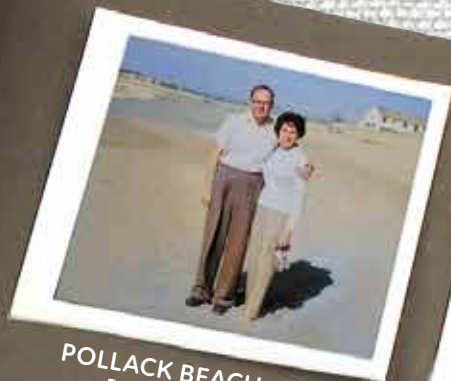
1955 | PORT ELIZABETH
Birdie with Sharon, Irene and David

Now you know why Birdie always had so many teacups. No paper goods then, real china. The first time I heard of Emma Lazarus was when Birdie had to talk about her for the Ora Group.

Birdie also volunteered for the Chevra Kadisha and for 25 years was the chairwoman. The Chevra Kadisha is the organization that buries the dead. In PE if one belonged to the synagogue it included a funeral with plot. The traditional Tahara (preparing the body for a Jewish burial) was done by a volunteer group of men for men and women for women at the cemetery. I remember often being home for lunch and Birdie would leave at 1:30pm so she could go and do her job. Once they got to the Tahara house and discovered the body that had been brought was Philip not Phoebe so the funeral was late. The women also used to make the shrouds which they used to cut out one afternoon and sew together on another.

Once my father had a patient come to the house and saw him in his home office. After the patient had left my mother asked my father if the patient had noticed all the unsewn shrouds lying on the chair!

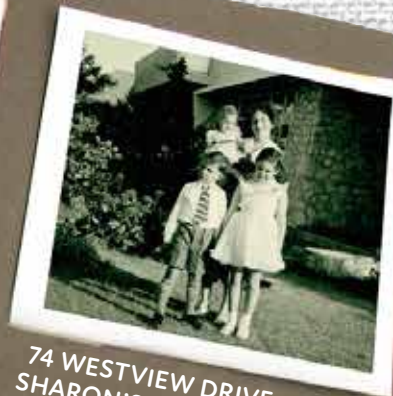




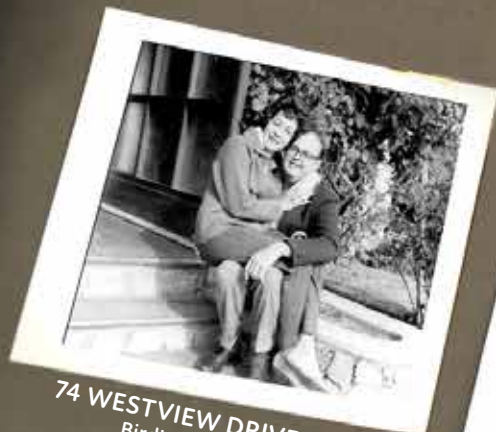
POLLACK BEACH, PE
Puffy and Birdie
1950s



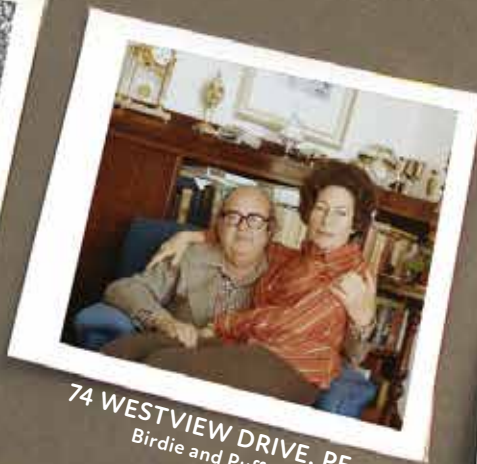
74 WESTVIEW DRIVE, PE
Birdie and Puffy
1960s



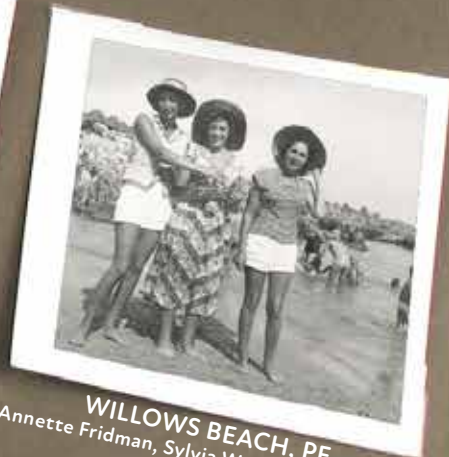
74 WESTVIEW DRIVE, PE
SHARON'S 1ST BIRTHDAY
Birdie holding Sharon David and Irene
1955



74 WESTVIEW DRIVE, PE
Birdie and Puffy
1963



74 WESTVIEW DRIVE, PE
Birdie and Puffy
1985



WILLOWS BEACH, PE
Annette Fridman, Sylvia Weinberg and Birdie
1950s



1958
Birdie Braiding my hair

My mother's job was attending to us and our education. Even though she was a teacher with a degree in English and Psychology, I now feel she never really understood children. Now that I am older, I feel that depression got in the way of her enjoying us as opposed to a job that needed to be done. She never complimented us and usually had a negative comment about my weight, my skin, my clothes as I was always a chunky child. There was never a positive comment about my hair which was my pride and glory as I had this beautiful, thick, long auburn hair.

Her nickname was "The Witch of Westview" as she always did the right thing even if it was unpopular. She also read tea leaves. If there was a debate about whether there was school or when an event was taking place, Birdie was always called as she knew when and where. We were expected to be an example to the rest of the community and so we mostly toed the line.

She had lots of friends and could be devastatingly funny and she did a mean imitation of some of her friend's quirks. Between Birdie and the rest of our friend's mothers we were brought up by a village.

Bobba kept a kosher style house. She refused to buy kosher meat as she could not stand the meshulachim (the religious people who used to come and collect for charity), and knew if the house was kosher they would be eating and staying with us. They always had to go to the surgery if they wanted donations.

One of my memories of helping to raise funds was the annual New Year, Rosh Hashanah, Fete. This was held in the Feather Market Hall at the end of August and different booths were set up. Women had been sewing and knitting the whole year and one could buy hand sewn dresses, socks, knitted toys, doll's clothes, blankets and so on. You could not buy those things in stores in those days. It was after WWII and many things were in short supply, unobtainable or not even invented yet. There were also food stalls and Birdie's specialty was fudge and she used to make batches of it. People made cakes, cookies, taiglach and preserves and anything else that was a good seller and needed for a sweet New Year. They also had a 'white elephant stall'. This was a table where things you did not want were put out for prizes. It was called the tombola. You paid your money and received a ticket, then won the prize that corresponded with your ticket number.

Remember even socks were hand knitted in those days, no machine knitted cheap socks yet. We wore school uniforms so we had very few real clothes. When Granny Dora came to town to see the travelers to buy stock for the shop, Birdie would go with her and choose clothes for us. If we didn't like the item when it arrived, Birdie sent it to Cradock to be sold in the Cradock shop. When Bernhard Mierowsky worked for Gretermans I used to get clothes there or at Garlicks. When I was about 14, Bernhard started working for the ladies clothing manufacturer, Jaffe and Co, and as I was a sample size (then!) I used to try on all the samples and then



FEATHER MARKET HALL, P.E.

1963 | WILLOWS BEACH, PORT ELIZABETH
Irene and Birdie



buy the items I liked at a discount. I then received the sample clothes items when they were not needed anymore.

My mother had a beautiful figure and was well dressed and often went shopping with her friends, her opinion was always respected. Once we were out of the house she took up needlework and also yoga. The chair and the two wall artworks were embroidered by her. The yoga was taught by an older woman who used her garage as her studio. I used to make fun of it but now I am older I wish I could apologize as I realize how good it is for health and I think it improved Birdie's balance so much that when she had Parkinson's Disease, it helped lessen some of the effects.

My mother had lots of friends. She was especially close to Sylvia Weinberg, Ruby Strelitz and Elsa Budlender (Ruby and Sylvia were sisters, Elsa the sister in law). She was always playing bridge, going to friends for tea in the afternoon, attending her charity groups and other volunteering.



1958 | TRAFALGAR SQUARE, LONDON

Birdie with Elsa Budlender



1960s | HUMEWOOD BEACH

Lottie Levinthal, Birdie, Sylvia Weinberg and Denise Perl



1990 | PORT ELIZABETH

Surprise 45th wedding anniversary. Birdie and Puffy arrive with their friend Rae Markman

Most Saturday afternoons while Puffy took us three children out, Birdie would go to Rae Markman and there they would chat and listen to music. Most Saturday nights my parents went to friends for dinner.

During the week there were always concerts and theater but what I remember most was Birdie taking Siegfried Dinn to the musical concerts. He was the brother of a friend of hers who was mentally scarred as he had been put in the Hitler youth as a Jewish child in Germany. The family escaped but Siegfried was never the same. He would never leave the house except with his sister or with Birdie. His one love was music and Birdie used to pick him up and take him to every concert.

Birdie was a homebody and Cradock was always on her mind. Granny Dora's letters, written in Yiddish were read at mealtimes. She also sent books to Dora from the library at Garlicks, the department store, as there were no lending libraries at that time. She borrowed the books, I think it cost about 5¢ each for two weeks and brought them home. The books would be wrapped up in brown paper with a string tying them up and sealed with red wax. The parcel would be mailed and once read Dora would return them.

Birdie was very close to her brothers and kept in contact with them all the time. My parents went to as many simchas as they

1960 | WILLOWS BEACH, PORT ELIZABETH
Irene and Birdie enjoying time in the sun together





1974 | JOHANNESBURG

Birdie with her brothers David, Abe and Mousch

could. It was not easy before air travel and the good roads we have now. Today it takes not even two hours to get to Cradock by car. When we went on school vacations it was five hours on a throw up inducing gravel road, or a train ride leaving PE at 6 pm and reaching Cradock at 4 am in the morning!.

I don't remember my mother ever playing with us, or taking an interest in popular culture when I was growing up. Maybe it was not done as we had the maids who looked after us and were outside a lot.

As a grandmother she relaxed more and did spend time with her grandchildren. She loved to buy them clothes and spent a lot of time reading to David's girls and was very close to them.



1985 | CHICAGO

L-R: Ruth, Puffy, Birdie, David, Judith, Irene

When Puffy died Birdie stayed in the house for a short time before going to live at Park Sheraton, an apartment building where she had friends. David still visited her for lunch every day. She always had a maid with her and when she needed someone to help with medications she moved to an assisted living apartment in St Georges Park.

Birdie died October 10, 2000. I always remember my mother when getting dressed. She always used to say "To be well dressed is to be correctly dressed", and never left the house without "putting on her face".

EARLY 1950s | PORT ELIZABETH

Birdie, Lucien and Esther Levy, Buddy, Puffy and Elsa















My Father, Alexander Pracher Albert



MY FATHER, ALEXANDER PRACHER ALBERT WAS BORN IN EAST LONDON ON OCTOBER 6, 1918. HE WAS THE FOURTH OF FIVE CHILDREN. After his older sister Tedzia and Rebecca (Rita), and his brother Jacob (Jack) Samuel and before his brother Leon Pracher. Pracher was the surname of his paternal grandmother.

Puffy, as he was nicknamed because he was a chubby child and used to puff up the hill to and from school and the beach, grew up in East London. The following story was written by my father in the late 1980's and never finished.

My Life:

WRITTEN BY ALEXANDER P. ALBERT.

I was born on the 6th October, 1918, the 4th child. My father was David Albert who was born in Lemburg at that time part of the AustroHungarian Empire. He had come to South Africa as a young man to join a cousin Mrs Herman who together with her husband had a business in East London. They had



SELBORNE COLLEGE.
EAST LONDON.

1st February, 1936.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

This is to certify that Alexander Albert has been a pupil at Selborne College for several years. He completed the course for Senior Certificate of the Cape Education Department, and was successful in passing that Examination in December 1935, being placed in the Second Grade.

He is a youth of excellent character, of a studious disposition and one who has always occupied a very honourable position in his class throughout his school career. He was unfortunate in not obtaining a First Class in the Senior Certificate Examination by only a few marks. I am pleased to know that he intends to continue at Rhodes University College and I am sure that his career at that Institution will be very creditable, and very successful.

He has in addition taken a very active interest in most extra-mural activities at Selborne and especially in Rowing and was a member of the successful crew which gained such a brilliant victory in the "Maidens" in the Buffalo Regatta in December 1935. He has moreover put in a lot of solid hard work as Regimental Q.M.S. in the School Cadet Corps.

He has been very popular at School and is a youth of the highest integrity. I shall be pleased at any time to do what I can to further his interests and can recommend him as a thoroughly reliable youth.

St. H. J. A.
PRINCIPAL.



SELBORNE COLLEGE

(Where boys become men)



1926 | EAST LONDON | ALBERT SIBLINGS

L-R: Puffy, Rita, Tedzia, Jack

FRONT: Leon



1930 | EAST LONDON

Puffy (with his cat) and Leon

one son who was later to go to Rhodes (University) and obtain a Dr. of Literature and end up as a teacher in Tarkastad. I believe my father was brought out to be a companion for him but understand that Julius Herman had a very bad temper and being an only child this did not work out well.

My mother was Rosetta Florence Solomons, she was born in Kimberley, the second child and first daughter, of Jacob Samuel Solomons who was the son of Moses Solomons and came from the East End of London. His father Moses, is recalled as a cane merchant but the story is told that in fact they had a cane furniture factory. He had two sisters who never married and he was obliged to use the tradesman entrance. He left home to come to the Diamond Diggings in Kimberley where he ran a General Dealers business on the Du Toitspan Road. Here he met and married my grandmother Ruth Holmes. They had 3 children Alfred, Rosetta Florence and Miriam.

The outbreak of the 2nd Boer War gave rise to the Siege of Kimberley. My mother was at that time 10-12 years old. She would tell how she stood in queues to get rations and Cecil John Rhodes would ride out on a white horse to inspect the soldiers and the defenses. My grandfather served in what was the equivalent of the Horse Guards. Unfortunately he caught meningitis and although they could diagnose it, they could not cure it and he was buried in a grave in Kimberley.

He must have been a well read man as he received the Pickwick Papers of Dickens as well as other literature including the Zionist Record at regular intervals from London. He was a Freemason and a member of the Lodge in Kimberley. I must still find out where he was initiated. He is buried in the Old Jewish Cemetery in Kimberley. My grandmother and my mom made a trip to England by sailing ship. In England she was "maguired" (converted to Judaism) but I don't think she got on well with my grandfather's family. All pictures of her show a tall attractive woman with a good figure and a pretty face. Some time after my grandfather died she married again, Sapiro, and had three more children. Reuben, Max and Ethel. I never ever met him. I remember as a child that we were preparing to go to Kimberley for a holiday when he died and the holiday was canceled. My grandmother subsequently moved to Grahamstown.

Julius Herman I remember as a rather short portly man. I remember once meeting us for a cup of tea at the Orient Cafe at the Orient Beach and having cream cakes. The Orient Cafe in those days was one of the centres of social life. A large double story building, downstairs was a restaurant and upstairs a ballroom for Social Functions such as dances and small weddings receptions. Mrs Herman was a large woman in a large hat and dressed in Victorian style and reputed to be wealthy.

My mother went to school in Kimberley as far as six (USA 8th grade) which was school leaving in those days. I knew little about Alf, her eldest brother except that he was in the army and subsequently joined the R.A.F. I believe he rose to be a pilot and saw action in the later part of the 1914-1918 War. By coincidence my father's brother was conscripted into the Austrian Regiment.



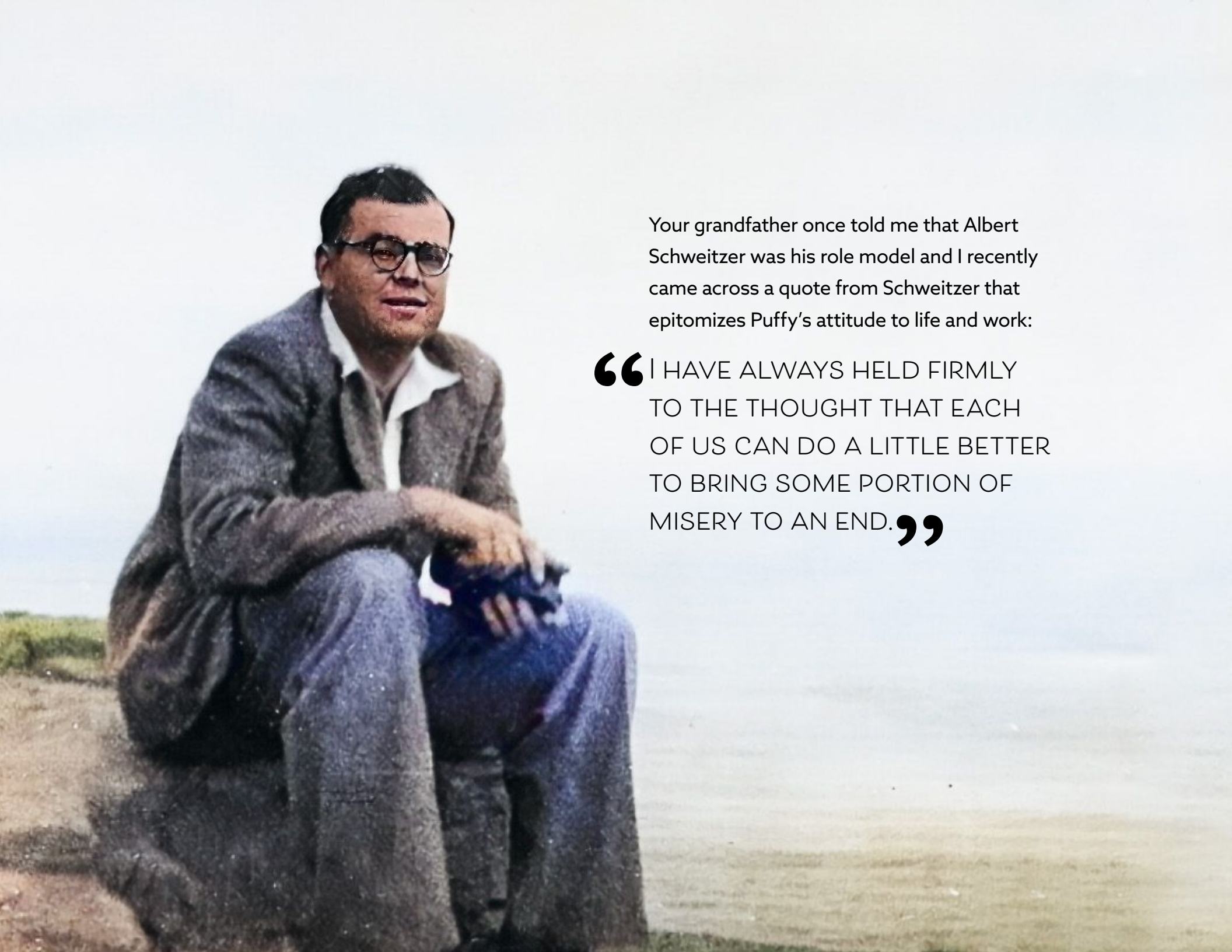
1940
Puffy at beach



1945
Puffy in his first car



SEPTEMBER 22, 1945
Birdie and Puffy on honeymoon



Your grandfather once told me that Albert Schweitzer was his role model and I recently came across a quote from Schweitzer that epitomizes Puffy's attitude to life and work:

“I HAVE ALWAYS HELD FIRMLY TO THE THOUGHT THAT EACH OF US CAN DO A LITTLE BETTER TO BRING SOME PORTION OF MISERY TO AN END.”

My mother left school and went to work for John Orr and subsequently transferred to a subsidiary of theirs called the Remington Typewriter Company. She was subsequently transferred to East London where she was the Head Lady. In those days women were not employed as clerks or shop assistants. Her charter was to assist in selling typewriters and to teach men and women how to use them.

She always told the tale of one of the men of the travellers who was also an amateur magician. On his travels he would hire an African, put one of the large iron encased typewriters on his head and one in each hand. As they walked along the man made road he would put a half crown piece under every large rock they passed. The African would turn over the rock and find nothing. On their return from the shops to the Hotel where he stayed he would appear to return the half crown (two shillings and sixpence) pieces from under the rocks. The African would throw down the typewriters and run off as fast as he could.

My mother must have been very capable in her job. She was one of the first women in the Cape to secure a motor car drivers license. I know very little about their early lives except that they were married on the 12 September 1912. Whether Mr Herman had died and left the business to my Dad or whether he had started his own business I do not know. I do know that they went by horse and Cape cart to

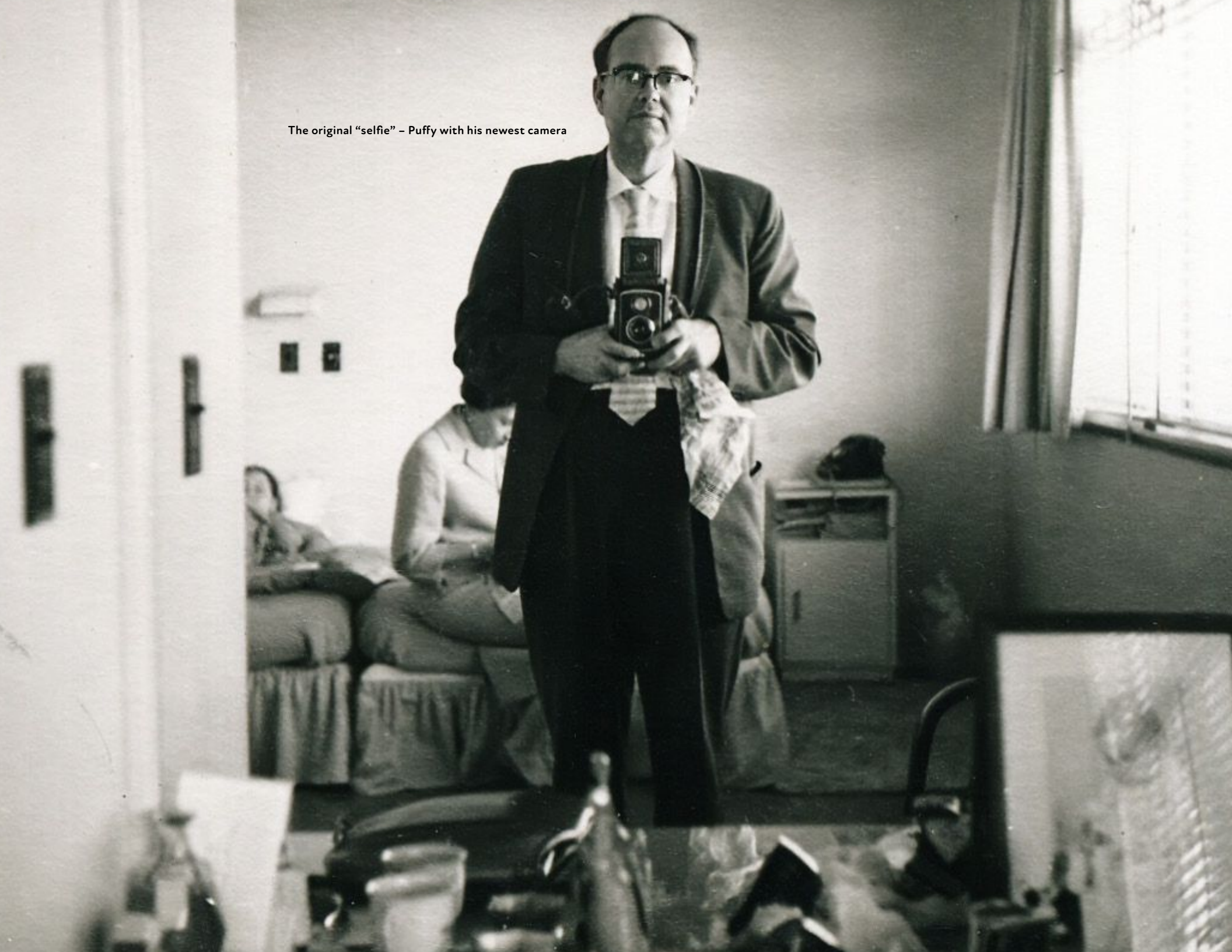


1970S | INVERNIZZI'S MAYORAL INDUCTION OF PORT ELIZABETH
Mr and Mrs Invernizzi, Birdie and Puffy

Dribank a little village between King Williams Town and Bushman for their honeymoon.

Tedzia was born on 8/8/1914 just when war broke out. My mother destroyed my father's Identity documents and told the authorities that he was a Russian so he was not interned. Rita was born in 1915, Jack in 1916. I was born October 6 1918 and Leon in 1922. I do not remember much of my early days. I do remember when we lived in Southernwood off St Georges St. I do remember that

The original "selfie" – Puffy with his newest camera



Manny Strelitz and I bought large fish hooks from a shop. I was lying under a bed reading. Jack who was lying on a ? tried to catch me. As he was using his hand under to catch me I jabbed the fish hook into his hand and then had to call in the surgeon to remove it. We were playing 'hide and go seek' when Rita cut her big toe on an empty bakkie and had to be stitched up by the doctor.

We went with the Stelitz's on a picnic to Blind River Estuary Beach. We had a little push cart made of a paraffin box. On the way back we got lost on the Southernwood Beach. Petrus who was bringing home the cows rescued us and brought us home. From Southernwood we moved to Fleet Street next. The house was attached to the Fire Station and whenever the fire alarms went off we were woken up. Dad was in partnership with Jack Horwitz's father and the store was named Albert and Horwitz on the Market Square. We would go early on



1945 | HUMEWOOD BEACH, PE
Puffy

a Saturday morning to the German market and buy our breakfast. From the house we used to walk down to the Orient Beach, at that time there were no houses, only bush right up to the Signal Hill. We would gather berries and wild fruit.

At about this time, about 5, I was sent



1947 | DECEMBER
Puffy and Birdie with baby Irene

to school, de Waal. It was situated in the northwest of Oxford Street. I started in kindergarten and as I was Jewish I was involved in fights almost every break. We did not have books but used slates and a slate pencil so what you wrote could be erased. I broke more slates than I used. It



1985
Puffy



1960s | SANTORINI, GREECE
Puffy on donkey



1950s | HUMEWOOD BEACH, PE
Puffy

was a coed school. I was friendly with a little girl called Peggy. All I know is that she developed TB and died. A number of the other girls became prostitutes.

Next year I was transferred to Selbourne Primary and put back in Sub A. I was not very bright and was always losing my cap. In those days the school was next to the Regimental Ground so I was given a note to take home, have signed and bring back the next day. Needless to say I was always losing it.

It was 1925 and the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII came to visit and all the pupils had to parade in the Regimental Grounds. About this time I went with Jack on holiday to Grahamstown where Grandma Sapiro had a house. I remember two things. We went for a walk and I got lost, a family member found me. He took us to Rhodes and blew glass goblets for us from laboratory glass. (It must





BEACH
BABY

