

## THE TELFED HISTORY PROJECT

### Aliyah in September 1961 – Our Story

By Sammy Berger

**11<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

Myra and I made Aliyah with our infant son in September 1961, shortly after I qualified as a Chartered Accountant. Our Aliyah was facilitated through the offices of the Cape Town SA Zionist Federation, and we were met at the Lod airport on a sweltering hot day by representatives of the SA Zionist Federation in Israel, then headed by the highly-regarded Sam Levin. We spent 5 months at Ulpan Shapiro in Petach Tikvah, and were a group of 16 SA families, mainly young couples with small children; most remained and put down solid roots in Israel, a few did leave however for various reasons.

Myra, is the daughter of Joseph Alperin who was born in Neve Tzedek, a neighborhood of Tel-Aviv, who left Palestine in the early 1920's, went to Cape Town to earn money for his widowed mother and 7 seven sisters in Tel-Aviv, met and married Kate, nee Cohen, of Muizenberg and remained in Cape Town; Myra has a sister, Rhoda, now in Toronto.

After the Ulpan I found employment with the Africa- Palestine Investments group of companies in Tel-Aviv, then controlled by well-known SA Zionist families and headed by Chairman Jack Geri, ex Johannesburg, who in 1953 was appointed by Ben Gurion as Minister of Commerce and Industry; he served for a short while as a cabinet minister; Jack Geri sadly suffered a devastating stroke shortly after my starting my new job. Max Schumacher and Gerald Selbst, together with Attorney Eli Kirschner then managed API for many years. The group, now named – Africa- Israel Investments- is controlled today by Lev Leviev.

With the help of loans and from an unexpected windfall of a 66% “Deluxe” devaluation of the Israeli Lira we bought a small apartment in Petach Tikvah and thereafter in 1966 an apartment in Kiryat Ono, where we remained for 51 years. The devaluation occurred on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 1962, Myra's 24<sup>th</sup> birthday, which I always took as a good omen from the “heavens” for our family. In July 2017 we moved in our old-age to Ra'anana, now living near our son.



After about 17 years I left API and joined the Herouth company, owned by Solel Boneh, the Histadrut building and real-estate development group. As financial controller I visited Herouth's branches in Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Kenya and Rome. Having Cape Town registered as my place of birth in my Israeli passport caused me many unpleasant interrogations by the then very anti South African Nigerian immigration authorities. In 1988 I joined a privately-owned company remaining there until my retirement in 2003.

Myra and I have 3 married children, 10 grandchildren, and for now 3 great-grandsons.



The early years for Myra were not easy, raising our son and 2 Israeli-born daughters alone with no close family back-up, no home telephone available, and with me away frequently on military reserve service, and especially during the Six-Day War and the Yom-Kippur War. At the age of 60 Myra started art lessons and developed into a talented artist; today our extended family has scores of her lovely abstract and portrait paintings adorning the walls of their homes.

Soon after retiring in 2003 and through to 2016, I worked as a volunteer at The Libi Fund, the non-profit organization authorized by the Israeli Army to raise funds for the benefit of the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces. LIBI was then run by a small group of army officers and today, after merging with the Agudah Lema'an Hahayal is an integral part of the army fund-raising organization for IDF soldiers, "Yahad-United for Israel's Soldiers". I did translations from Hebrew to English - newsletters, promotion material, etc., as well as handling correspondence with overseas supporters and donors. I also accompanied from time to time English-speaking groups of donors on visits to army bases and facilities.

In March 2013, I was awarded a Certificate of Merit at a special event held for LIBI volunteers. The guest of honor was the then Chief of Staff, Lt.-Gen. Benny Gantz, who after handing me my certificate, and with a big smile, insisted on giving the bouquet of flowers to Myra, who accompanied me on the stage.

I am proud and pleased to add that all our children and grandchildren to date completed in full their mandatory army service – 2 grandchildren did an extra year of voluntary service. I myself did reserve military service to the age of 52, initially in a combat unit and then in an economic audit department of the Israeli Air-Force.



Samuel (Sammy) and Myra Berger

8 Golda Meir Street, Ra'anana.