

Abstract of an interview of Sol Liebgott under the auspices of the Lithuanian Memorial Foundation – Southern Africa Oral History Project

Name: Sol Liebgott

Address: 18 Achad Haam Street, Jerusalem 92103.

Place of Birth: Dagda, Latvia

Date of Birth: 10th February, 1915

Sol Liebgott's parents originated from Dagda, Latvia. Together with his parents Sol arrived in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1922 when Sol, an only child, was seven years old. Mrs. Liebgott had two brothers living in South Africa, who sponsored the Liebgott family's journey to South Africa. On arrival in South Africa the Liebgotts stayed for a brief period with one of Mrs. Liebgott's brothers in Ophirton, a mining suburb of Johannesburg. The Liebgotts moved to Doornfontein, another suburb of Johannesburg largely populated by eastern European immigrant Jews. Sol was educated in Doornfontein and spent his youth and young adulthood there. In Doornfontein he became a founder member of the fledgling religious Zionist youth movement that later evolved into Bnei Akiva. Soon after World War II Sol married Greta (nee Oskowitz) and they had three daughters, Ziona, Ilana (Lunnie) and Debbie. At the end of 1972 (fifty years after his arrival in South Africa) and just over a year after Greta passed away Sol realised his lifelong ambition of aliyah together with Debbie, his youngest daughter, joining his two elder married daughters (Ziona and Ilana) who were already in Israel. He initially settled in Savyon, where he lived for about six years until soon after his second marriage to Barbara. Sol and Barbara moved to Jerusalem at the end of the 1970s, where they reside until the present time.

In his young adult years in South Africa Sol was a founder of Hashomer Hadati (later Bnei Akiva) and as a staunch Zionist throughout his life, Sol became involved with the S.A. Zionist Federation. He was also seriously involved in all matters of Jewish education, especially the Jewish day school movement (King David Schools), and served as vice chairman of the S.A. Board of Jewish Education. Sol took a leading role in all the communal institutions of the

South African Jewish community, sitting on their respective executive bodies. He was also highly active in charitable organisations, both locally and in Israel, and he personally hosted numerous visiting Jewish dignitaries. He chaired several committees of the Zionist Federation and the editorial board of its weekly organ, the Zionist Record. He was elected national chairman of the S.A. Zionist Federation in 1968 and served in that capacity until 1972, the year of his aliyah. He was particularly active in founding the Yeshiva College in the late 1950s and served as chairman of that institution from 1967 until his aliyah in 1972. Almost immediately after his aliyah Sol became an executive member of the S.A. Zionist Federation, a position he still retains. He became highly involved in several institutions in Jerusalem and embarked on fund-raising campaigns on their behalf. He is currently a governor of the Hebrew University, a board member of the Shaare Zedek Medical Center, a former president of the Herzog Hospital (Ezrat Nashim) and chairman of the Events Committee of the Friends of the Hebrew University.

Key Words: Zionism, general and religious; Jewish education; Jewish communal activities in South Africa and Israel

**Interview of Sol Liebgott under the auspices of the Lithuanian Memorial
Foundation - Southern Africa Oral History Project**

Venue of interview: The residence of Sol (and Barbara) Liebgott

Date and time of interview: Sunday, 9th July, 2006, between 11.00 a.m. and noon

Interviewer: Shirley Roth

My name is Shirley Roth and I'm interviewing Sol Liebgott on Sunday the 9th July in his apartment on Achad Haam Street No. 18 in Jerusalem.

Do you know my daughter, Ziona?

Of course I know Ziona.

What is your marital status?

Married.

And how many children do you have?

Three.

And how many grandchildren do you have?

Eleven.

Thank G-d.

Where were you born?

In Dagda, a small town in Latvia.

When did you leave Latvia – at what age did you leave Latvia?

I left Latvia in 1922, so it means I was seven.

Seven. And you obviously left with your parents. Did you leave with other siblings?

No. Just with my parents.

Were you an only child?

I wasn't born an only child. I had two brothers who had died in a dysentery epidemic in Dagda still. They were two brothers who were older than I. At that time when I say "older" I

was six or seven, they were nine and ten or so, and both of them succumbed to the epidemic of dysentery in Dagda.

Now, what made your family leave Dagda?

Well, because of the whole (situation) - it was just the beginnings of the Russian Revolution, the Communist Revolution.

Would we call that the Civil War?

Well, I suppose you could call it a civil war, but it affected the whole of Russia and all its possessions, of which Dagda, Latvia was one. It was cold, and hunger and disease, everything you could think of, and on top of it having lost two children, my mother was anxious to leave the country.

What made them go to South Africa?

Simply that she had two brothers who were already living in South Africa, and they sent us the means to undertake the journey, because it was quite costly for the three of us to go, so they sent us the means to travel.

When you were in Latvia did they suffer antisemitism at all?

Well, maybe I was too small then to feel it.

Your parents didn't talk about it?

Not that I can remember.

So there were no specific antisemitic outbreaks at that time?

No, not that I remember. But I don't think so. The main reasons that compelled them to leave were a) the economic situation and b) the loss of two children.

And the hunger and the disease and the starvation and the poor living conditions, which you've outlined very well.

Right. It's all in the book; that chapter of it.

OK.

Were you always Family Liebgott?

Yeah.

OK, that was my personal thing. Right, and when you got to – where did you get to – what was your first point of landing in South Africa?

Cape Town.

And how long did you stay there?

As far as I can remember, hardly any time. Immediately. There was no plane journey then from Cape Town to Johannesburg. We took a train.

Did you have much luggage?

I don't remember. Probably...

Where did you grow up in Johannesburg? Which suburb?

We started off in a suburb called – are you from Johannesburg?

Yes.

We started off in a suburb called Ophirton. At that time my late uncle, in other words, my mother's brother, had what they called in those days a concession store... It was a mining area and the Africans who were working in the mines would come to make all their purchases, clothing, food, whatever they needed, to my uncle's store. My uncle had two children. His wife died in the 'flu epidemic that occurred throughout the world actually at that time –

The late twenties –

In 1922

In 1922 there was a worldwide flu epidemic and his wife died. My uncle's wife died. He was left with two small children and I suppose we stayed with him in the early stages and I think he expected my mother to take care of the children. He didn't want to remarry and I think he expected my mother to take care of the children. But she was in no condition to do it. She still hadn't overcome the trauma of having lost two children and then there was the language. She didn't know a single word of English and the children were somewhat unruly. They were on their own. There was no mother to take care of them. My uncle, their father, was busy in the running of the business and he was incapable of taking care of the two children. So I

suspect, in retrospect, that he wanted my mother to take care of the children, but she was absolutely – not unwilling – but incapable because of the situation to take care of them.

That's perfectly understandable.

Ja.

When did you move to Johannesburg? I mean Ophirton was just outside Johannesburg.

Oh no. Ophirton was a suburb of Johannesburg.

Near Booyens? Near that area?

That's right. More or less. Ophirton, Turffontein...

In other words, the Southern Suburbs.

The Southern Suburbs, yeah. But at time it was virtually a mining area.

And from there? Where were you educated?

I started school in Ophirton. The unhappiest period of my life! They were all Afrikaans, or some of them English speaking. I didn't know a solitary word of English. When the teacher asked my name, I didn't know what she was asking me. And then I came home crying – I was still then seven – I came home crying and I said to my – I spoke to my parents in Yiddish and I told them. I said, "They asked my name and I said Zalman," which was my given name. My dear uncle, who was very assimilated said, "You can't call yourself Zalman here."

And that's how I came by the name Solly or Sol, which I hate to this day. But then I was stuck with it and when I came back to school the next day I said my name was Solly. I was there not for very long until we moved to Doornfontein, which was virtually a Jewish area in those days. I don't know how much you remember. You were born in Johannesburg?

I was born in Johannesburg, in Highlands North, but my parents, my family --- I don't know if you know my late uncle, Henry Michalson?

Yeah, the name is very familiar. Henry Michalson...

That's an aside. They all lived in Doornfontein. In fact, my brother was born in Doornfontein.

Of course, once we moved to Doornfontein -- They had a school there called the Jewish Government School. Do you remember it at all?

Corner of what was it?

End Street.

End Street, "bidiuk". By the park there...

But although it was called the Jewish Government School there was nothing Jewish about it.

The reason for it was that a Jew owned the ground on which it was built and he gave it to the government to build a school on condition that it was called the Jewish Government School.

But there was nothing specifically Jewish about it.

Interesting! Because I always thought it was because there were so many Jews who went to that school.

No, no. It had nothing to do with that. It was due to the fact that the ground was presented by the owner, a Jew, provided that the government called it the Jewish Government School.

But it was a normal government school.

So, if your uncle was assimilated where did you get your Jewish education from, your Jewish orientation?

It was all there in Doornfontein. I think if I remember correctly they did have one period of Hebrew at the Jewish Government School. But my Jewish orientation virtually came when I joined, which was quite a few years later, the Bnei Akiva movement.

Weren't you one of the founders of Hashomer Hadati?

I was. Yeah.

And what year was that?

It was quite a few years on. I'm talking about 1922. I came to high school.

Which high school did you go to?

Athlone. At that stage, now I think Athlone High School, which still exists, is a --- When I went there it was

Mixed

It was mixed. Then the girls left. They went to Observatory.

That was in the fifties; in the early fifties.

But that was much later, because my late wife actually went to Observatory. I remember there was a song about it to the tune of “Funiculi, Funicula”. (Singing) “Observatory, Observatory, the school upon the hill.” That’s all I remember about it.

That was very interesting. But, again, until you got to ... What made you become one of the founder members of Hashomer Hadati?

Well, when I became interested in things Jewish – then it was called the Young Mizrachi.

There was a Mizrachi movement there but with seniors, older people, and someone by the name of Joe Green, I don’t know if the name –

I remember Joe Green.

You remember him?

One of my uncle’s friends.

Oh yeah? He was a very unassuming fellow but he took the initiative and he created the Young Mizrachi. And over time, I mean while we called ourselves Young Mizrachi, none of us were really youth, young people. I mean we were all in our late teens and Joe was really, I must give him the credit for that, he was the one who took the initiative to create a youth movement, which at that stage we called Hashomer Hadati, which eventually became Bnei Akiva as Hashomer Hadati was a somewhat cumbersome name. And then I joined up with Joe Green and there were a couple of others who pioneered the movement.

But your parents were not particularly religious at that stage?

I would say they were observant –

Observant? Traditional?

I wouldn’t say they were terribly religious –

Traditional – as most Jews were.

Traditional – exactly.

What vocation did you embark on, after school?

Somehow all the usual professions which so-called nice Jewish boys go into – medicine or law, accountancy, or architecture – none of them somehow had an attraction for me. I just

didn't feel I wanted it and I had to look for a job. We're running sort of chronologically. My first job – I had a few odds and ends but I had to earn some money. My parents were very -- Poor? Normal?

And one of my early jobs was at the Johannesburg Public Library, and there I really found my niche. I loved the work. Eventually I was promoted. I started as a messenger, which was the lowest rank there and I took an interest in things and I did a lot of reading. I just loved reading. I read a lot and I was promoted to what they call Readers' Advisor. In other words, people come in, you're confronted with hundreds, thousands of books and most people just don't know what (to choose). There were I think two or three of us who were Readers' Advisors. They want to sum up a person – what sort of things he or she would like and recommend books to them. The joke was there when one woman picked out a book - they tell it as a joke but it actually happened - picked out a book and she said, "Maybe this one?" And I said, "Madam, I'm afraid that book you'll find rather heavy."

And she said, "Well, it doesn't matter. I'm here by car."

What about Shabbat and Chaggim while you were working?

No, I had to work on Shabbat. There was no way out of that.

OK, like most Jews. But when you came home it was –

When I came home it was Shabbat and when you asked me the question how traditional or observant my parents were, I mean one incident would answer that question. My father would struggle in the first few (years) – the first year or two. (He) opened what we would call here a "makolet" – you know, a little shop but he hated shop keeping and he was on a lookout for something else. And strangely enough, I think I mentioned it in my book, I can't remember. Dad could hardly speak or read English and we had the local paper, you know, "The Star", which we used to get every afternoon. And we were sitting in our lounge in our home and reading it and he said to me in Yiddish – Do you know Yiddish?

Yes.

He said, "*Zog mir. Vos willen ze dohr? Vos beten ze dohr?*" (What are they asking for?)

And I took the paper and I saw it was, how he spotted it to this day I don't know, it was an

official municipal notice, and there were lots of them in The Star – you know, various news items, municipal notices which asked for tenders to clear anything of value out of the refuse dumps. There were at that time, I still remember the figure, 26 refuse dumps surrounding the city of Johannesburg, so that the garbage collection which we see here all the time, would come to your home, take all the garbage and then go to the nearest dump and just throw in the garbage that the trucks had collected. Now amongst them, amongst all that garbage, there were bottles, there were old rags, you have an old dress, an old shirt, anything that you just throw away in the garbage, there was all that. There were various pieces of scrap metal – you know, anything that you throw out, so all that stuff, whatever the person who got this, who tendered for this particular (position) – he was permitted to take out anything of value from the garbage dumps and sell it to various people who dealt with it. The bottles, of which there were hundreds, you would take to certain bottle yards that were then recycled. The same thing with clothing. They would – the old clothing would be recycled. They make in the mattresses what they called coir – I think that’s what they call it – that was recycled, so they used to sell the old clothing, anything made of any kind of material, to these kind of businesses - that old coir. And so everything had its value. The pieces of metal he would take to certain organisations. All of this stuff was recycled and had some value. He tendered for this, and to this day I don’t know how he arrived at the sum, and I was still at school. I said to my father in Yiddish, “Well, how much should I tender?” So he thinks – he says, “*Twanzig funt a monat.*” (Twenty pounds a month)¹ How he came to that figure I don’t know. And he was the successful tenderer. And it was under the City Engineers Department, this whole thing. They invited him, they asked him to come over to sign official papers. I came with him because he didn’t know what he was going to ask, and I explained my presence to the official at the municipality, the city engineer, that my father knows very little English, he asked me to come, and he said, “Perfectly alright.” Very courteous. And he

¹ In the book, “From Dagda to Jerusalem via South Africa. The Memoirs of Sol Liebgott” (hereafter: Dagda to Jerusalem), p. 24, Sol Liebgott writes that the amount his father tendered for was £35.00 per month

had to sign documents saying that he was entitled to any of these refuse dumps and collect whatever he wanted. Now, I come to your question about Jewish observance. Came the question of going out. He bought a truck and he went out in the truck with one or two Africans to pick up... At all these points he would have an African employed by him. When they threw all the garbage into the dumps, the Africans were instructed what to pull out. So, there was an accumulation of the stuff. And he would come every day with his truck and collect up all this stuff and then sell it - whatever he had. The problem then arose about Shabbat, because the moment you left stuff overnight you wouldn't find it the next day, because there were little piccanins (piccanninies) who were just waiting for them to steal a few bottles and run to the bottle yard and get a few pence for them. For them it was a fortune. So whatever you left overnight immediately disappeared the next morning. So came the question – the first Shabbat that he had this business and he was in a dilemma. He was more or less prepared to go, I mean it was his living. And my mother absolutely put her foot down and said, "You are not going to travel on Shabbat!" And it was really a loss – it means that one-seventh of what he had to collect was lost. The next morning it had disappeared. All the little piccaninns would come and fetch it. So she put her foot down and under no circumstances, and that sort of showed me what it means to sacrifice in order to observe Shabbat. It was a real sacrifice. In those days even German Jews who had stores would keep open on Shabbat, unwillingly, but this was their *parnasah*.

Where was your Zionist orientation from?

It was from when once I joined what was then the Young Mizrachi.

So in other words, you were quite raw. You didn't know anything about –

At that time, no. We're talking now about 1920-1930, when the Zionist movement was still in its early stages. Of course, there was no Jewish state at that time.

Now we're going on to the war years. Did you serve in the army?

Yeah. I was in the Public Library. After I was there for about four years – I must have joined it in 1935 and I was there till 1939 and then war broke out. There was no conscription in South Africa. It was all voluntary. But as Jews, you know, we felt it was our war, and I joined

up. If I'd say that being living in Ophirton was the unhappiest life (sic) of my life, it was the second. The unhappiest life (sic) of my life was in the army. I hated every day of it.

You went up north?

No, that's the point. Some of my friends – also from the Young Mizrachi – we were a group of four who joined up. They all decided to go for the signal corps. Why I don't know, but they wanted to go, so I also signed up for the signal corps. But then they gave me an eye test and I failed the eye test. I have one eye (out of which) I can hardly see. And so they put me on to packing parachutes in what was called Robbens --- now it's called Voortrekkerhoogte, but what was it called then? Robbens something. I've forgotten – I have to check my own book.² And then I stayed until the end of the war packing parachutes. But it was an important job because, *chas veshalom*, if you packed them incorrectly it could cost lives. It has to be absolutely exact.

But why was it so miserable?

I hated the discipline. I had to report for early morning – what do they call it? – the roll call – to make sure that I hadn't deserted or anything, so there's a roll call and the officers to whom we were responsible were all what we used to call in good Yiddish, "*chateisim*". They were Afrikaners and some of them could hardly read. And they were our bosses. I hated the discipline and the people to whom I was responsible. I mean, they were so ignorant. At that time, like the Uzi gun today in the Israeli army is one of the staple weapons, at that time it was a thing called the sten gun, so you had to learn, I had to learn the basics even though I wasn't involved in actual fighting, I had to learn the basics. I'll never forget it. The instructor who was showing us the sten gun – so, you had to pull it apart and then learn how to put everything back in place again. He pulled it apart and he says, "Now, you put this in there and this in there and this in there and this, as illustrated above." He'd learnt it from the book, you see, and it said as illustrated above.

What about food at that stage? What did you do about kashrut?

² The venue is not mentioned in *Dagda to Jerusalem* in the section of the book dealing with Sol Lieb Gott's army service, pp. 26-28

Well, that was a problem. I used to exchange the meat for eggs and things.

[At this point we were interrupted by a phone call so I put the tape recorder on “pause” and in my confusion, did not return it to “record”. For the rest of the interview I had to rely on my recall and mental notes that I listed straight after the interview.]

Sol noted that he did not return to work in the library after his release from the army, although he retained his interest in literature that was nurtured during his high school years by his English teacher at Athlone.³ She encouraged his love of the English language and English literature.

Sol admitted that his mother was largely responsible for his love of music, stating that she had a remarkable voice and had circumstances been different for her, she could well have had a successful career as a singer.

Sol recalled visiting Dagda, his birthplace, at the first opportunity after the fall of the Iron Curtain. He found it noteworthy that the double-storey house in Dagda that belonged to Sol's parents⁴, the only extant house belonging to a Jewish family, was indeed the only double-storey house in the town and reflects the family's affluence until the Communists nationalised all private property and assets and reduced the Liebgott family to poverty. Notwithstanding, the Liebgott family was not without influence and connections in Dagda before they emigrated to South Africa and with former members of the Dagda Jewish community throughout the world. To illustrate this point Sol recalled his father's role in assisting Berele Chagy, who also originated from Dagda and served as the chazan of the Doornfontein Shul, with his appointment as chazan of Temple Beth-El in the United States, through Mr.

³ Sol mentioned her name but I cannot remember it.

⁴ The cover of Dagda to Jerusalem portrays a photograph of the Liebgott family home.

Liebgott's connections with another *landsmen* from Dagda who was influential in Temple Beth-El.

Communal and Zionist activities in South Africa:⁵

Starting from his involvement with Mizrachi, Hashomer Hadati and subsequently Bnei Akiva, as a staunch Zionist, Sol Liebgott became involved with the South African Zionist Federation. He was also seriously involved in Jewish education, especially the Jewish day school movement (King David Schools), and served as vice chairman of the South African Board of Jewish Education. Sol took a leading role in all the communal institutions of the South African Jewish community, sitting on their respective executive bodies. He was also highly active in charitable organisations, both in South Africa and in Israel, and he personally hosted several visiting Jewish dignitaries. He chaired several committees of the Zionist Federation and the editorial board of its weekly organ, the *Zionist Record*. He was elected national chairman of the South African Zionist Federation in 1968 and served in that capacity until 1972, the year of his aliyah. He was particularly active in founding the Yeshiva College in the late 1950s and served as chairman from 1967 until his aliyah in 1972.⁶ On the other hand, Sol had little to no involvement with non-Jewish institutions.

Reasons and motivating factors for aliyah:

The two major forces that influenced Sol Liebgott's whole life and communal activities in South Africa were Jewish education in all its forms and his strong adherence to Zionism. Consequently, Sol was motivated to realise his Zionist ambitions through personal aliyah and that of his daughters, who were seriously involved in Bnei Akiva. Unfortunately, Greta

⁵ Although the details outlined here are taken from *From Dagda to Jerusalem*, Sol specified all these activities during the interview.

⁶ *Dagda to Jerusalem*, p. 58. There is a discrepancy regarding the period of chairmanship of the Yeshiva College. Sol Liebgott writes that he assumed chairmanship of the Yeshiva College in 1967 for seven years, whereas he went on aliyah in December 1972.

passed away before she could realise her own lifelong ambitions of aliyah together with Sol (may he be blessed with long life, until 120 years!).

The Liebgott family:

Ziona married Bernard Lerer, a medical student from Cape Town, in July 1970 and Lunnie married Shlomo Melmed, also a medical student from Cape Town in January 1971. Sadly, while Greta was able to participate in Ziona's and Bernard's wedding, she succumbed to her illness and passed away the day after Yom Kippur 1970, a few months before Lunnie's and Shlomo's wedding (may the whole Liebgott family be blessed with *chaim arukim* until 120 years).⁷ During 1971 both couples made aliyah, leaving Sol and Debbie in South Africa; Sol to wind up the sale of his business and hand over the reigns to, and train the new owners in the intricacies of the business, the only one of its kind in South Africa, and Debbie to complete her first degree. However, at the first opportunity Sol and Debbie went on aliyah in December 1972.

During the course of his Zionist, communal and charitable activities in South Africa, Sol was no stranger to Israel and the Israeli scene, and had formed close alliances and acquaintanceships throughout the years. Generally a close-knit family and particularly so soon after Greta's passing, Sol felt that he should find a home that could comfortably accommodate Ziona and Bernard and Lunnie and Shlomo, in addition to Debbie and himself, that was also within close proximity to Tel Hashomer, where his sons-in-law (Bernard and Shlomo) were working, and Bar Ilan University, where his daughters were studying. For this reason, while never over enamoured with the area and the community, Sol decided to live in Savyon, a location between the two institutions in a house that was capacious and suitable for his needs and belongings.

Due to his communal and Zionist activities in South Africa that led to several visits to Israel prior to his aliyah, Sol acquired many acquaintances and friends in Israel that facilitated his

⁷ Although Sol recalled the weddings and Greta's death during the interview, the dates were taken from *From Dagda to Jerusalem*, pp. 67, 69-70.

aliyah to some degree. In addition, and despite his lack of spoken Hebrew during the initial stages of his aliyah, Sol became involved in several cultural and educational societies and almost immediately became an active executive member of the S.A. Zionist Federation. Soon after their aliyah, Debbie met Zeev Jaffe, her future husband, on the campus of Bar Ilan University. By strange coincidence, Zeev is a son of Maurice Jaffe, with whom (Greta and) Sol had become friendly since the early 1960s, when Maurice first came to South Africa as an official of the World Mizrahi Organisation to assist the South African Mizrahi Organisation, and later Maurice's several visits to South Africa to raise funds. Shortly after the marriage of Debbie and Zeev in Savyon on Lag B'Omer 1974 all three couples left the Liebgott home in Savyon to make their own homes, leaving Sol alone in Savyon. Ziona and Bernard Lerer live in Alon Shvut (Gush Etzion), Ilana (Lunnie) and Shlomo Melmed live in Los Angeles, and Debbie and Zeev Jaffe live in Raanana. While, for obvious reasons, none of Sol's three daughters served in the Israel Defence Forces, all of their husbands did, and all of Sol's grandchildren living in Israel have served in the Israeli army. Bernard Lerer and Shlomo Melmed are South Africans (both from Cape Town) and Zeev Jaffe is an Israeli.

After Debbie's and Zeev's marriage, while still living in Savyon, Sol often spent Shabbatot with the Jaffes in Jerusalem, where he met his present wife, Barbara. They were married in Savyon in 1978,⁸ but soon afterwards moved to Jerusalem where they both preferred to live and also to relieve Barbara of commuting from Savyon to Jerusalem, where she was an active volunteer guide in the Israel Museum.

Sol admitted that his relative inarticulacy in Hebrew, especially in the early days of his aliyah, did not hinder his integration into Israeli society. He attributed his integration into the society

⁸ There is a discrepancy in *From Dagda to Jerusalem* regarding dates. Sol and Barbara were married on 6 June 1978 (p. 90); Sol states that nine years had passed since Greta's death and "I had now to give serious consideration to my own future..." (p. 89); yet Greta died on the day after Yom Kippur 1970 (p. 67)

to his longstanding communal work in Zionist and educational institutions in South Africa that enabled him to become acquainted with several key personalities who were/are involved in the upper echelons of local Israeli organisations and institutions, and even members of Knesset, such as Dr. Joseph Burg (whom he singled out). Further, in the course of his communal activities in South Africa, he had visited Israel several times prior to aliyah and, thus, was no stranger to the country and the society.

In response to the question regarding Sol's involvement in community affairs in Israel, he stated that he was actively involved as a board member in Telfed, Ezrat Nashim/Herzog Hospital,⁹ and Shaare Zedek Medical Center.¹⁰ He was also a governor of the Hebrew University and, subsequently, an active member of the Friends of The Hebrew University.¹¹ At this stage, he recalled that when former South African Louis Pincus became involved with the Jewish Agency (Sochnut), he wanted to remodel the North American Zionist movement on a similar basis to the S.A. Zionist Federation. He subsequently sought Sol's advice and assistance, based on Sol's vast experience with the S.A. Zionist Federation. However, Louis Pincus was unable to unite all the different Zionist factions under one umbrella organisation like the S.A. Zionist Federation. Sol explained that the reason for the success of the South African Zionist organisation lay in the very special nature of the South African Zionist community, a particularly cohesive body unlike any other Zionist community in the world.¹²

Sol was proud of the South African Zionist leaders' expression of their Zionist ideals, noting that five past chairmen of the South African Zionist Federation, namely, himself, Julius Weinstein, Itz Kalmanowitz, Solly Sacks and Joe Simon, had all made aliyah, unlike most

⁹ For further details please see *From Dagda to Jerusalem*, pp. 93-96

¹⁰ *From Dagda to Jerusalem*, pp. 96-97

¹¹ *From Dagda to Jerusalem*, pp. 97-101, 104-106

¹² I believe that the South African Zionist community could well owe its cohesiveness to the fact that South African Jewry is largely comprised of people who originated from the same area, i.e., Lithuania/Belorussia/Latvia.

leaders of the Zionist organisations throughout the world. In fact, he remembered that they had all met to commemorate this event.¹³

At the end of the interview Sol gave me his book, *From Dagda to Jerusalem*, in response to my request for any documents, photographs or any other relevant material to the Liebgott family.

¹³ In a private conversation with Joe and Phyllis Simon on Shabbat Shuvah, they stated that they had initiated the gathering in their home in Har Nof just after their aliyah 7 years ago to commemorate this landmark occasion.