WINNIE GOURARIE

A LEGEND IN HER OWN TIME

I was born in a small *chassidishe* town called Dokshitz, which was in the province of Minsk in Belarus, White Russia. Both my parents were also born in Dokshitz.

My father, Rabbi Yirmayahu Aloy, was born into an extremely poor family. Apparently, his great-grandfather and two friends walked to the Tzemach Tzedek from Dokshitz, which was a very long way, because they didn't have money for a horse and wagon. My father used to tell us that he remembers his *upsherenish*. Someone in shul gave him one little piece of chocolate to celebrate the occasion. When my father was ten years old, his mother died of hunger. His father, however, lived to a ripe old age, but when he was in his nineties he was forced by the Nazis to dig his own grave in Dokshitz before being shot. We heard from people who survived that his *yahrtzeit* was on the very same date that my father passed away many years later here in South Africa.





(1) L-R: Shlomo, Michoel, Rochel Leah, Shaina. Michoel's wife passed away and he never remarried. (2) L-R: Winnie's mother-in-law Baila Gourarie, Winnie, and Winnie's mother Rochel Leah Aloy in Eretz Yisroel after the engagement of Winnie and Sholom Ber. (3) Winnie with her mother Rochel Leah Aloy in Dokshitz. (4) Winnie and her mother Rochel Leah. (5) Winnie Aloy Gourarie's two zaides. With the white beard: Reb Michoel Rivkind, her maternal grandfather, who turned white overnight at a young age when he was arrested by the communists for having a cheder in Dokshitz. Her paternal zaide, Reb Avrohom Moshe Aloy, was forced by the Nazis to dig his own grave when he was over 90 years old. (6) Winnie and her father Reb Yirmiyeh Aloy after they first moved to South Africa. Winnie was five years old (1939). (7) Yirmiyeh and Rochel Leah Aloy (nee Rivkind) at their tena'im.

My mother's family was a little better off than my father's. My maternal grandfather, Michoel Rivkind, was a *melamed*, and he had a *cheder* in his home. My mother was the oldest of three children and she lost her mother to smallpox when she was nine. My grandfather never remarried, and he taught my mother to run the house at a very young age. He was a colorful character and an excellent teacher. He used to say that if he taught the wall and the wall didn't understand, it was his fault! He was known to be able to "*shprech op ahn ayin hora*" – to get rid of the evil eye. Apparently his technique worked! One day a man woke him up at three in the morning, crying that his horse was sick and he needed an urgent remedy. He begged him to get rid of the evil eye for his horse. My grandfather was so aggravated to be woken at such a ridiculous hour for a horse that he told the man that he couldn't do it because he didn't know the horse's mother's name!

Because my father's family was so poor, when his mother passed away he had to leave the *cheder* where he learned and help to support the family. At first he became a messenger for a bank, and later he studied and became a bookkeeper. He learned to read the Torah, and a Rov in Dokshitz told him that if he came to him every Shabbos morning he would test his *leining* and he would give him a bun and a glass of milk. He therefore worked very hard at this skill and eventually became an outstanding *baal koreh.*

Before the war there were five shuls in Dokshitz. Four of them were *chassidishe* shuls and one was a *misnagdishe* shul. Of the *chassidishe* shuls, one was a "tailors' shul," where all the tailors used to congregate. Another was a "shoemakers' shul," and other tradesmen had their own shuls too. The Rov of the *chassidishe* community in Dokshitz was Reb Leib Sheinin *Hy"d*. It was said that the

Rebbe Rashab called him a *beinoni* of the *Tanya*. He was a big *oved* and *davened* for hours. Unfortunately, when the Nazis, *yemach shemom*, came to Dokshitz, they collected all the Jews of the town and herded them all into the shul where Reb Leib Sheinin was in the middle of davening *Shacharis*. Then they set the shul on fire. The people panicked and many became hysterical. When Reb Leib realized what was happening, he made an announcement: "Yidden, we are going to be *korbonos*. But a *korbon* with a *mum* [defect] is not accepted Above. So we have to be *b'simchah*! We have the *zchus* to be *moser nefesh* for being Yidden, let's not lose our heads!" He then began dancing and singing the *niggun* of *hakafos*. The Nazis became so angry at this that they killed him before they burned down the shul with most of the Jews in it. (The story is known because there were some men hidden in a crawl space under the shul who survived and brought the story to America, where they told it to several people including Reb Yochanan Gordon.)

MY FATHER'S LIFE IN YESHIVA

At the age of 14, my father, Yirmiyahu Aloy, left Dokshitz and went to Vilna to look for employment. Although he was very bright and talented, he never thought he would have the opportunity to go to a yeshiva. In Vilna he met a friend who introduced him to one of the *Ramim*–lecturers–in the Ramailes Yeshiva. When this man heard my father's story he offered to look after all his physical needs if he joined the yeshiva. My father grabbed the opportunity and never looked back. The president of the Ramailes Yeshiva was the famous Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky. My father, being an excellent *baal koreh*, earned pocket money from reading the Torah in Vilna. He also served as a *baal tefillah* and a *baal tokeah* in one of the local shuls. When Rabbi Grodzinsky became old and frail, there was a *minyan* in his home on the days that the Torah was read and my father was the *baal koreh*.

He begged him to get rid of the evil eye for his horse. My grandfather was so aggravated to be woken at such a ridiculous hour for a horse that he told the man that he couldn't do it because he didn't know the horse's mother's name!

One time, on Rosh Chodesh, Rabbi Grodzinsky sent my father to the *amud* to *daven shacharis* and *hallel* and then he read from the Torah as usual. After that Rabbi Grodzinsky insisted that my father continue with *musaf*. After *davening*, Rabbi Grodzinsky went up to my father, put his hand on his shoulder and said, "*Du kenst shein zein a Rov in America*"–you can already be a Rabbi in America. My father loved to joke that he had "*semichah*" from Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky!

After the Ramailes Yeshiva, my father went to the Slonimer Yeshiva. The *Rosh Yeshiva* there was Rabbi Shabsi Yogel. His father-in-law was a very wealthy man who only had daughters, so he hired a *melamed* to teach his daughters Torah. As a result, Rebbetzin Yogel, who was very bright, became a *lamdanis* in her own right. She could learn like a man.

My father was often a guest at the Yogels' Shabbos table, together with some friends. One time one of his friends complimented the *rebbetzin* on the delicious food. The *rebbetzin* thanked him and asked, "Why are you so surprised? When I put my head into the pot it must be good!" I merited to spend three weeks in the home of Rabbi and Rebbetzin Yogel in Eretz Yisroel after I finished school. After I was married and my husband and I went to Eretz Yisroel for a trip I introduced my husband to them. They were absolutely thrilled with my choice.

Eventually Rabbi Yogel sent a group of *bachurim* to the prestigious



(8) Wedding of Sholom Ber and Winnie Gourarie.

Yeshiva of Mir. My father was one of them and he was known there as Reb Yirmiya Dokshitzer. The Mirer Yeshiva was very strict about *seder*, orderliness. When a student arrived in the Yeshiva he had to have a special loop sewn on his coat in order to hang it on a hook assigned to him. Underneath his coat he had to put his *galoshen* (rain boots) tidily. For untidiness a student would be fined a certain amount that he had to donate to the library. I think that in addition to all the Torah that my father learned in the Mir—and my father was a well-known *talmid chacham*—he acquired his organizational skills there. He was always super organized!

MY PARENTS GET MARRIED

In the year 1931, at the age of 21, my father became engaged to my mother, Rochel Leah Rivkind, his neighbor from Dokshitz who was two years older. My father came home from the Mir but there was a problem. My grandfather Michoel did not allow them to get married until my father got *smichah*. However, my father was too shy to go back to the Mir as a *chassan* at such a young age to continue learning there. At that time in Mir there were *bachurim* of 35 and 40 who were still learning and not thinking of marriage and here he was, extremely young and already engaged. The *mashgiach* of the Mir, however, sent him a postcard asking him to come back to the yeshiva to learn and not to be embarrassed. But because of problems with the army which prevented him from returning to the Mir, he went to study at the Lomze Yeshiva, where he eventually got *smichah* and received *kabbalah* to be a shochet.

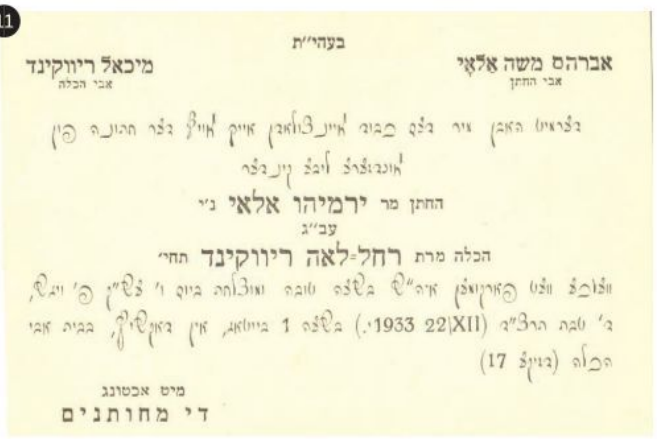
In the year 5694 (1933), my parents got married in the courtyard of the shul, on a freezing cold Friday afternoon. They moved into my grandfather Michoel's house in Dokshitz. Their best friends were the Gordon family: Reb Yochanan Gordon, his wife Zisha and their children. My father's best friend was Reb Nison Gordon, the oldest of Reb Yochanan's children. They remained best friends for the rest of their lives.

My father used to tell us about Reb Yisroel Gordon, Reb Yochanan's father. He was the *shochet* in Dokshitz and was also an expert *baal koreh*. He taught many people in Dokshitz to *lein* but he himself only sometimes *leined* on a Monday or a Thursday, but never a whole *parshah* on a Shabbos or a Yom Tov. People asked him why and he answered with typical Gordon wit, "Because I can't *lein* very well. I didn't learn by Yisroel the *shochet*!"





(9) Esther Sternberg and her father Zalman Gourarie; Sholom Ber and Winnie Gourarie. (10) Tena'im of Sholom Ber and Winnie Gourarie in the home of Tema and Nosson Gourarie in Crown Heights. Notice the candles, bent over from the heat. Standing L-R: Shirley Levitin, Rita Golshmid, Esther Wineberg, Chava Gourarie, Esther Sternberg (12 years old), Zelda Raskind, Batsheva Rosen, Tema Gourarie, and Tema Althaus. Seated, L-R: Kaila Rothstein, Rebbetzin Mindel Katz or Rebbetzin Gittel Mentlick, Winnie, Rochel Leah Aloy, Zisha Gordon, Bunya Haskind. (11) Wedding invitation of Yirmiyahu and Rochel Leah Aloy (1933).



בעהי"ת

אברהם משה אלאי
אבי החתן

מיכאל ריווקינד
אבי הכלה

החתן מר ירמיהו אלאי נ"י
עב"ג
הכלה מרת רחל-לאה ריווקינד תחי'

מיט אכטונג
די מחותנים

The friendship between my family and the Gordon-Goldman family continues until this day.

My father saw the Frierdiker Rebbe five times. As a *bachur* he once helped out at the secretariat of Lubavitch in a town called Gleboka. There he met the Rebbe, who was then known as the Ramash, for the first time. The Rebbe asked him where he was learning and he said that he was learning in the Mir. The *mashgiach* in the Mir at the time was Reb Yerucham. The Rebbe asked my father to say over a *mussar vort* from Reb Yerucham, which he did.

Although my father always learned in Litvishe yeshivas and was exposed to the Litvishe way of learning, he was a fully committed *chossid* and never did a thing without first consulting the Frierdiker Rebbe and then later the Rebbe for their consent and blessing.

I was born on the 9th Kislev 5694 (November 16, 1934) and was named Vichna after my maternal grandmother.

In the winter of 5695, at the instruction of the Frierdiker Rebbe, a Lubavitcher Yeshiva was opened in the town of Gleboka and my father was appointed the *Rosh Yeshiva*. Unfortunately, the Yeshiva ran into financial difficulties and had to close after a year. Again with the blessing and consent of the Frierdiker Rebbe my father was appointed the *shochet* in the town of Druye. This was considered an important position and at this time he also received *kabbalah* from the *mohel* of Vilna to be a *mohel*. He circumcised many babies but sometimes after a *bris* if he heard the baby crying from the other side of the town he couldn't sleep at night! (The town of Dokshitz was very small and the houses were close to each other, so one could hear other people's babies crying at night.)

SETTLING IN SOUTH AFRICA

In 1937, people were beginning to realize that Eastern Europe was no longer safe. My mother's brother and sister were both in South Africa so my father decided to go to South Africa. Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky, whose brother-in-law was the senior Rabbi in Johannesburg, managed to get him the necessary documents and to pay for his trip. He became a *meshulach* for a Yeshiva in Brisk. He was not exactly cut out for the job because he managed to raise only enough money to pay for his trip but no more! He arrived in South Africa in 1937, leaving my mother and me

behind. The plan was that he would work and collect enough money to send us tickets to follow him. His first job was at a shul in a small town close to Johannesburg, called Boksburg. At that time, *Yiddishkeit* in South Africa was such that on Rosh Hashanah when a man was called to the Torah and got an *aliyah*, he gave a donation to the shul; the amount that was pledged was written down, then and there! My father was so astounded that after Yom Tov he wrote a letter to his father saying that for the first time in his life he had witnessed "*B'Rosh Hashanah tikoseivun!*"

He did not stay in Boksburg for long. His next job was also in a small town called Benoni (reportedly given this Hebrew name, which means "son of my affliction," by the surveyor, who endured much distress trying to establish the boundaries of this town). Here there was a warm, *heimishe* community and my father made life-long friends there. I am still friendly with some of their descendants to this day.

It took two long years until my father was able to bring us out to join him in South Africa, and it was only in August 1939, two weeks before World War II broke out, that my mother, my grandfather and I landed in Cape Town from the very last boat to enter the country. The boat, named the *Warwick Castle*, was sunk by the Germans on its way back to London.

We made our home in Johannesburg. I was already four and a half years old so my parents went to register me at a nearby kindergarten. When the teacher asked for my name and was told that my name was Vichna she burst out laughing. "You can't call her that in South Africa! Everyone will laugh. Let's call her Winnie," she told my mother. So Winnie it remained, and although my parents never gave up on "Vichnale," I got used to Winnie and rather liked it.



Mrs. Winnie Gourarie during her interview with the *N'shei Chabad Newsletter.*

A SISTER IS BORN

We settled in Johannesburg and I was very happy in kindergarten. When I was five and a half years old my sister Batya was born on a Shabbos in 1940. The maternity hospitals in those days were very strict about visiting hours, but my father being a member of the clergy could enter at any time. Still, that Shabbos the nurses refused to allow him to see my mother and he didn't even know whether she had given birth to a girl or a boy. At the hospital that day there were four other women who had given birth and they all had boys. When my father begged the nurses to tell him whether his wife had given birth to a girl or a boy, they told him that his wife had given birth to a boy.

The excitement was great! He ran straight back to shul and told everyone the good news. He arranged a *shalom zachar* and even a *bris* for the following Shabbos, and straight after Shabbos he went with a bunch of flowers to visit my mother during visiting hours. She heard him speaking to the nurses and presumed that they told him that his newborn baby was a girl. She decided to fool him and tell him that the nurses made a mistake and that he really has a son! When she told him this, he replied that he already knew that he had a son. After a while she realized that he was serious, so she told him the truth! Can you imagine– he now had to face all his friends and acquaintances, cancel the *bris* and tell me that I now had a sister and not a brother. I believe I did not accept this so easily and I had to be persuaded that a sister is just fine.

My father, with his wonderful sense of humor, told this story at my sister's wedding, emphasizing the fact that he was so happy he had two daughters because at that time, without a Jewish school or a Yeshiva in South Africa, and travel being out of the question, he and my mother could never have raised a son of the calibre of his two illustrious sons-in-law. My brother-in-law, Rabbi Moshe Kurtstag, is the *Rosh Beis Din* of the whole of the united community of South Africa, and my husband, although he was a businessman, was a *talmid chacham* of note and a devoted *chossid* of the Rebbe.

My elementary school was called "Jewish government." The only thing Jewish about it was that it was closed on all Jewish holidays. Then I attended Athlone High School, a public school where the student body was 95% Jewish. For *limudei kodesh* we all attended an afternoon *cheder*. I had a very happy childhood. I used to ride my bicycle to school and to *cheder* and I had lots of friends.

A VISIT TO THE FRIERDIKER REBBE

In 1948, when I was 14 years old, my father heard that his half-sister Bat Sheva Rosen had had a heart attack. He had never met her, so he decided to fly to America to be with her and at the same time see the Frierdiker Rebbe, whom he had not seen since leaving Eastern Europe. Bat Sheva recovered well and my father was able to reconnect with his dear friend Reb Yochanan Gordon and his family. Reb Yochanan was already the *gabbai* at 770, a position he held for many years. It was Shavuos time and the Rebbe had a *minyan* outside his room as he was unable to go downstairs. Reb Yochanan arranged for my father, who was an expert *baal koreh*, to *lein* at the Rebbe's *minyan*. Afterwards the Rebbe told Reb Yochanan that he recognized the voice and knew who had *leined*, even though he hadn't seen him for all those years.

At that time it was very difficult to understand the Rebbe's speech. Whoever went in for *yechidus* had to go in with the Rebbe's secretary who was able to understand what the Rebbe was saying. My father refused to have the secretary go in with him. He maintained that he would understand every word the Rebbe would say and he did. It was at this time that there were elections in South Africa and the Nationalists–the Afrikaner party–won the elections. Everyone thought that this would be disastrous for the Jews and they anticipated another Holocaust. During *yechidus* my father asked the Rebbe whether he should perhaps bring his family to America. With a big smile on his face the Frierdiker Rebbe told my father, "*Fort aheim*"–go back home! This was the beginning of the apartheid era and although the blacks in South Africa were treated most unfairly, the Jews were not negatively affected.

In my teenage years I joined the Bnei Akiva movement, which in those days was called Hashomer Hadati and was the only *frum* youth movement. I spent many happy years in the movement. I enjoyed camp every year and eventually became one of the leaders of Bnei Akiva.

THE HISTALKUS

During that time Rabbi Yosef Wineberg was a frequent guest in my parents' home. He came to Johannesburg for a period of two to three months every two years. In 1950, when I was 16, I came home from school one day and found our whole house in mourning. Rabbi Wineberg and my father were walking around in socks, crying, and my mother was beside herself. They had just received a telegram that the Frierdiker Rebbe was *nistalek*. I only heard after I was married that my brother-in-law, Rabbi Nosson Gourarie from Montreal, Rabbi Yoel Kahn, Mrs. Rivka Chitrik, and one or two others had boarded a boat from Eretz Yisroel to America to see the Rebbe and they knew nothing about the *histalkus* until they arrived in New York. Apparently, my husband's brother-in-law, Rabbi Tzvi Brodie, saw the news in the Israeli press before they left, but he didn't want to stop them from going, so he told no-one, not even my parents-in-law. Rabbi Wineberg remained in South Africa till after *shloshim* and on the Shabbos of *shloshim* he took a lot of *mashke* and *farbrenged* the whole day.

My father helped Rabbi Wineberg a great deal, as he did for every *meshulach*, no matter for what cause they came to South Africa. My father collected all the pledges and did all the bookkeeping. Very few people donated to any cause unless my father sanctioned it. The Lubavitcher Yeshivas offered my father a ticket to the Rebbe for all his hard work, but he refused to accept. He said he didn't want to sell his *mitzvah*!

After I completed high school I attended the "Machon Lemadrichei Chutz La-aretz" in Eretz Yisroel–a leadership course for members of all the youth movements. Prior to my leaving for Eretz Yisroel, Rabbi Yisroel Hazdan arrived in South Africa with his first wife. He had connections with the Rebbeim in Eastern Europe, but his main connection was with the Frierdiker Rebbe in Latvia. He was offered a position in Sweden in about 1932 and he accepted. When the Frierdiker Rebbe passed through Sweden on the way to America, Rabbi Hazdan was the *shochet* for the Rebbe in Sweden. When Rabbi Hazdan's wife became very ill, they were advised to relocate to a warmer climate and they chose South Africa.

Before they arrived, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote a letter to the senior Rabbi of South Africa, Rabbi Yitzchok Kossowsky, and asked him if he would please introduce Rabbi Hazdan to my father because my father was a "*mufla b'ahavas Yisroel*" – a "specialist" in *ahavas Yisroel*, and he would take care of him. My father and Rabbi Hazdan became firm friends from the day he arrived until they passed away. Rabbi Hazdan's wife passed

away soon after they arrived in South Africa and my father was *mesader kiddushin* at his second marriage to a charming and wonderful lady, Ella, with whom we all became close.

After I returned from Eretz Yisroel I attended the Hebrew Teachers' Seminary here in Johannesburg and then went to teach in a town called Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State for a year. I also taught the Jewish boarders at Eunice Girls High School, some of whom I still see today in Johannesburg.

While I was teaching in Bloemfontein I turned 19. My birthday that year coincided with the birthday of Winston Churchill. The South African papers were filled with the headlines, "Happy Birthday Winnie!" My father, who was the busiest man in Johannesburg but always had all the time in the world for his children and grandchildren, bought lots of newspapers, cut out these headlines, pasted them all over a big brown envelope and sent me a letter and a gift in this envelope.

When I finished my year in Bloemfontein my parents decided that it was time I looked for a *shidduch*. There was no-one for me in South Africa so off I went to America with my mother, who suffered from scoliosis and thought that she would see a doctor in America at the same time.

A TRIP TO AMERICA

In 1955 my mother and I traveled to America by boat. We spent a week in London and then took the *Queen Elizabeth* to New York. I was so seasick that I couldn't enjoy the luxury of that beautiful ship. Rabbi Wineberg arranged accommodations for us with a Rabbi and Mrs. Klein. I do not recall either of their first names, but Rabbi Klein was so tall that he was known as "*der heicher Klein*."

Soon after we arrived we had *yechidus* with the Rebbe. My mother and I went in separately. I weighed 92 pounds at the time and I wore a black suit that made me look even thinner than I was. I was told afterwards that the Rebbe asked Rabbi Wineberg if I was healthy! The Rebbe asked me to sit several times, but of course I didn't. Before I left South Africa I was given strict instructions on how to behave. Then the Rebbe asked me, "*Vi gefelt eich America?*"–How do you like America? I thought I must be truthful, so I said, "*Es gefelt mir in gantzen nit*"–I don't like it at all! I think the Rebbe was amused. I went on to ask a few questions of a personal nature and the *yechidus* was over.

Seeing that we arrived close to Pesach, my father arranged that we spend Pesach with his dear friend Reb Yochanan Gordon and his family. There I met my best friend Esther Goldman, the Gordons' only daughter. Although she was several years older than me and was already married with two children, we hit it off immediately. We were two of a kind! She was already corresponding on her father's behalf with my father and had sent him pictures of her handsome *chassan* and of the whole family at their wedding. She wrote beautifully. She had attended my Zeide's *cheder* in Dokshitz and years later, during a visit to South Africa, she recognized him on the photograph in my lounge.

When my mother and I came to New York, the Goldmans' oldest son Yossy (now Rabbi Yossy Goldman, who is the Rabbi of the largest shul in Johannesburg) was five years old. He used to sit me down and say, "Winnie, talk!" He loved to listen to my South African accent. Esther and I corresponded for many years and I still have some of her letters. Our friendship with the Goldmans was warm and everlasting. When their children, Yossy and Rochel, arrived in South Africa as *shluchim* we kind of adopted them. We participated in all of their *simchos* and supported them whenever possible. In New York, Esther and Reb Shimon provided a home away from home for our children when they came to Yeshiva and school so far away from home, at a time when telephone calls were very few and far between. They only came home once a year. My children never had to call the Goldmans if they wanted a meal or just wanted to talk. They would just come by and relax, feeling very much at home.

In the meantime, Rabbi Wineberg lost no time in getting to work. I had never seen a *bachur* with a beard in my life. To me a beard belonged on a mature Rabbi or an old man, so Rabbi Wineberg introduced me to quite a few boys without beards (in Lubavitch at the time there were many *bachurim* without beards). It didn't work. I suppose that if I was destined to marry a *chossid* it had to be the authentic kind. So one day Rabbi Wineberg asked me, "How would you like to meet a *bachur* with a beard?" I thought this would be very interesting, and the rest is history.

My future husband, Sholom Ber Gourarie, called me himself, introduced himself and said he would like to meet me. We spoke *Ivrit* and we spent a pleasant hour. But my husband had many doubts. Although he was interested, he felt he had to consult the Rebbe. What a privilege it was way back then when the Rebbe was there *beguf* and we could discuss anything and have complete clarity. My husband told the Rebbe that this girl that he met comes from South Africa and went to a public

co-educational school, her father doesn't have a beard and she seems very far from the upbringing that he was used to–how can this work?

What the Rebbe answered him remains a blueprint for my life from the day I got married. The Rebbe told him, "*Nit nor vellen di inyonim fun Chabad ba ir zich opleigen nor di inyonim fun Shpitz Chabad.*"–"Not only will the ideals and principles of Chabad be a given with her, but even the ideals of [those who have been part of Chabad for many generations]." And when my husband asked about the family, the Rebbe said, "*Zei zeinen yirei Shomayim beteva.*" – "They are G-d-fearing by nature." I am forever still trying to live up to this incredible compliment that the Rebbe gave me.

We got engaged on the 15th of Av 1955 and we had a *tena'im* catered by Mermelstein caterers in Rabbi Nosson and Mrs. Tema Gourarie's home. They went out of their way to make it very beautiful. My mother insisted on china dishes and cloth serviettes. Who ever heard of paper plates and paper napkins in South Africa in those days?

It was summer and the heat was unbearable. There was a beautiful candelabra with candles on the table, but we couldn't light them. The candles drooped and melted. There was no air conditioning in private homes at the time. When my *chassan* and I went for a walk we had to go into a bank to cool off. Most people were in the country at the time and my good friend Esther Goldman was not at our *tena'im*. The Goldmans were at the same bungalow colony as Rabbi Nosson and Tema Gourarie. Being that Tema was a relative, she had to come to the *tena'im* and Esther was left to look after Tema's children and her own! She was quite upset that she wasn't there and so was I.

When my mother and I arrived in America we were also privileged to visit the Rebbetzin Nechama Dina, wife of the Frierdiker Rebbe. It was a wonderful experience, but whatever we wanted to say we had to write on a pad of paper that was prepared on the table because the Rebbetzin couldn't hear. In 1955 every *kallah* still got a diamond ring at the time of the engagement. In Crown Heights the setting of every single ring was exactly the same, but every *kallah* would go into the Rebbetzin Nechama Dina to show her the ring. I didn't like the setting at all but I went in anyway and showed her my ring. My ring has been reset since then.

A SHEITEL AND A STORY

After the engagement my mother and I decided to fly home through Eretz Yisroel to meet my future in-laws, Rabbi Moshe and Mrs. Zlata Baila Gourarie. The Rebbe actually indicated that my mother should go home and I should remain in New York. I didn't listen. I didn't want my mother to travel by herself and as a result my *chassan* and I were separated for a whole year during the time of our engagement because my husband had great difficulty in obtaining a permanent visa for America. The Israelis refused to grant him a deferment from the army. Only after a whole year, through my father's friendship with members of the South African government, was he able to receive permanent residence in South Africa and only then were we able to get married.

Before my mother and I left New York for Eretz Yisroel, the Rebbe told my *chassan* to send my mother flowers before we leave. I suppose it was a kind of *tzeischem leshalom*–a farewell gesture.

In Eretz Yisroel I met and bonded with my very special parents-in-law and the rest of the extended Gourarie family. To this day I am very friendly with the Eichenshteins, the Chaskinds and the Butmans–all Gourarie girls. They are all so warm and loving. We keep in touch and speak often. The same applies to Esther Sternberg and her family. I was privileged to host both Esther and her daughter Rivka Slonim when they came to South Africa on speaking engagements. They are warm, wonderful people and we have remained very close.

My mother-in-law decided that since I was the first young girl to wear a *sheitel* in South Africa (except for the German Jewish community who all wore *sheitels*, but locally made ones that weren't exactly glamorous), she was going to buy me the best *sheitel* available in Eretz Yisroel. And the best *sheitel* it was–beautiful human hair with blond highlights, just like my hair, and it cost her $1,000 dollars in 1955! When I put it on after my wedding no one could believe that I was wearing a *sheitel*. Unfortunately, its success was short-lived. My hairdresser told me that at their salon they heard that I was going to put on a *sheitel* so if ever I wanted it washed and set I should bring it to them. After two months of marriage, my friend was getting married and I decided to have my *sheitel* washed and set. I gave it to my hairdresser, but no one was aware that in those days one could not put a human hair *sheitel* into water. The base would shrink. I ended up with a thousand-dollar *yarmulka*! I had to go to the wedding wearing a scarf! I have not worn a human hair *sheitel* since. I'm quite happy with my acrylic *sheitels*.

SHABBOS IN THE AIRPORT

On the way back from Eretz Yisroel to Johannesburg, we boarded a Pan American flight and stopped to refuel in Nairobi. It was almost Friday and we were somewhat delayed. We called the Rabbi in Nairobi to ask whether we could spend Shabbos with him and his family as we were afraid that we wouldn't arrive in Johannesburg in time for Shabbos. He told us that it wasn't convenient and that he thought we should continue on our flight and we would definitely make it in time for Shabbos (clearly not a Chabad rabbi).

We did arrive about three quarters of an hour before Shabbos, but I didn't realize that while on the plane I needed to fill in two forms for customs and immigration– one for my mother and one for me. I had only filled in one form for both of us. I told my mother to take the form and rush out to my uncle and aunt who were waiting to drive us home. My sister Bessie (now Batya Kurtstag) offered to stay behind with me. By the time I was able to fill in a second form and sign it, it was already Shabbos. I refused to sign the form, so they took my passport away and my sister and I settled down to catch up on all the news. The airport officials were very accommodating. They gave us the "crash room" where we were able to sleep, and they told us that we could help ourselves to anything we liked from the cafeteria. Of course we couldn't eat anything, but luckily my aunt had brought food with her in case we were stuck and given it to Bessie, so we didn't go hungry.



Rand
Daily Mail

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1955.

GIRL WON'T LEAVE JAN SMUTS AIRPORT

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Shabbos morning there was great excitement. Apparently my father, on his way to shul, saw large placards on the streets: "Girl Won't Leave Jan Smuts Airport!" The reporters didn't leave us alone. They took pictures, asked many questions and created a great sensation. I was the center of a huge controversy. Some people thought that I did the right thing; others felt that I was a hysterical girl. A Catholic newspaper printed an article praising the fact that I spent 24 hours sitting at the airport because of my religion and they can't even get their congregants to come for two hours on a Sunday! The correspondence continued back and forth in many newspapers for over a week– the press in Johannesburg, Cape Town, other places in South Africa, Australia, America, Eretz Yisroel and even the news on the ships. I became big news with reporters phoning me at home to ask what my fiancé had to say about my behavior throughout this whole episode. My *chassan* sent all the cuttings into the Rebbe's office. In retrospect it seems to me absurd that such a small incident should cause such a sensation. Maybe the newspapers had nothing else to write about in 1955...•

Stay tuned! We're only up to 1955. Part II of Mrs. Winnie Gourarie's memoirs, from 1955 to the present, will iy"H appear in the Tammuz issue.