

*Overleaf: Pearl Bernitz, 1944.  
She sent this hand coloured photograph of herself  
to her husband Mo in 1944, a short time after my  
birth. He was serving with the South African Air  
Force in Italy at that time.*

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## **Pearl Bernitz, born Abelsohn.**

Pearl Abelsohn was born on the 10th of January 1918, the sixth and last child of Sara Tsipe and Chaim Yechezkel, both immigrants from Lithuania. She was fifteen years younger than Lena, her eldest sister. Her early years were spent in Sea Point, where her father died when she was just thirteen. She was brought up by her widowed mother, and her older siblings, who doted on her. She remained close to them all throughout their lives.

Her parents very observant Jews, and she grew up in a traditional home, speaking Yiddish to them both. After she completed her schooling in Cape Town she worked in the family business.

The Abelsohn home in Cape Town was always open to visiting friends and family from the Transvaal. It was here that Maurice Bernitz met Pearl when her parents invited him home for a Shabbat meal whilst he was serving in the Air Force in the early 1940's. They married in February 1943, at the Roeland street Shul in Cape Town.

By 1944 Mo (as he was known to all) had been posted to North Africa and then on to Italy. He returned to Cape Town shortly before the end of the War. Mo, Pearl and I (aged 2) returned to Witbank, where they built a new home, in which Jill, Shana and Herman were born, and which remained the family home until we all left Witbank.

Pearl was an active member of the Jewish community and the Women's Zionist society. When in the early sixties Mo started a weekly local newspaper Pearl learned new skills, and became the newspaper's main proof-reader, a job she loved.

After Jill, Shana and I had all married and left home, Mo and Pearl (together with Herman) moved to Johannesburg, to be closer to their children and grandchildren. Mo died tragically of a heart attack in 1978. He was 55 years old. Mom never countenanced remarrying; she waited patiently to be reunited with him. She kept the poor man waiting for 35 years! But then she had always kept him waiting, ensuring that hair, makeup and nails were perfect before she left the house.



Pearl was a Lady of many parts.

Pearl our Mother and role model, who always reminded us do the right thing.

Pearl, the friend. Throughout her life she maintained contact with her Witbank friends, her Johannesburg friends and her London friends.

Pearl, the Chocoholic. Neither failing health nor failing eyesight separated her from her daily fill of chocolate.

Pearl the grandmother and great-grandmother, with eleven grandchildren and seventeen great-grandchildren, many of whom are in the UK, Israel and the USA. She was there for all of the bat and bar mitzvah's, the weddings and most of the births, and Bris'. She had a

Scottburgh, 1952



Top Row. Pearl in School uniform. Pearl, the debutante. Stylish and well-groomed, as ever.

Bottom Row: Pearl and Mo wed on February 7th, 1943. Pearl and Mo at the Union Buildings in 1945.



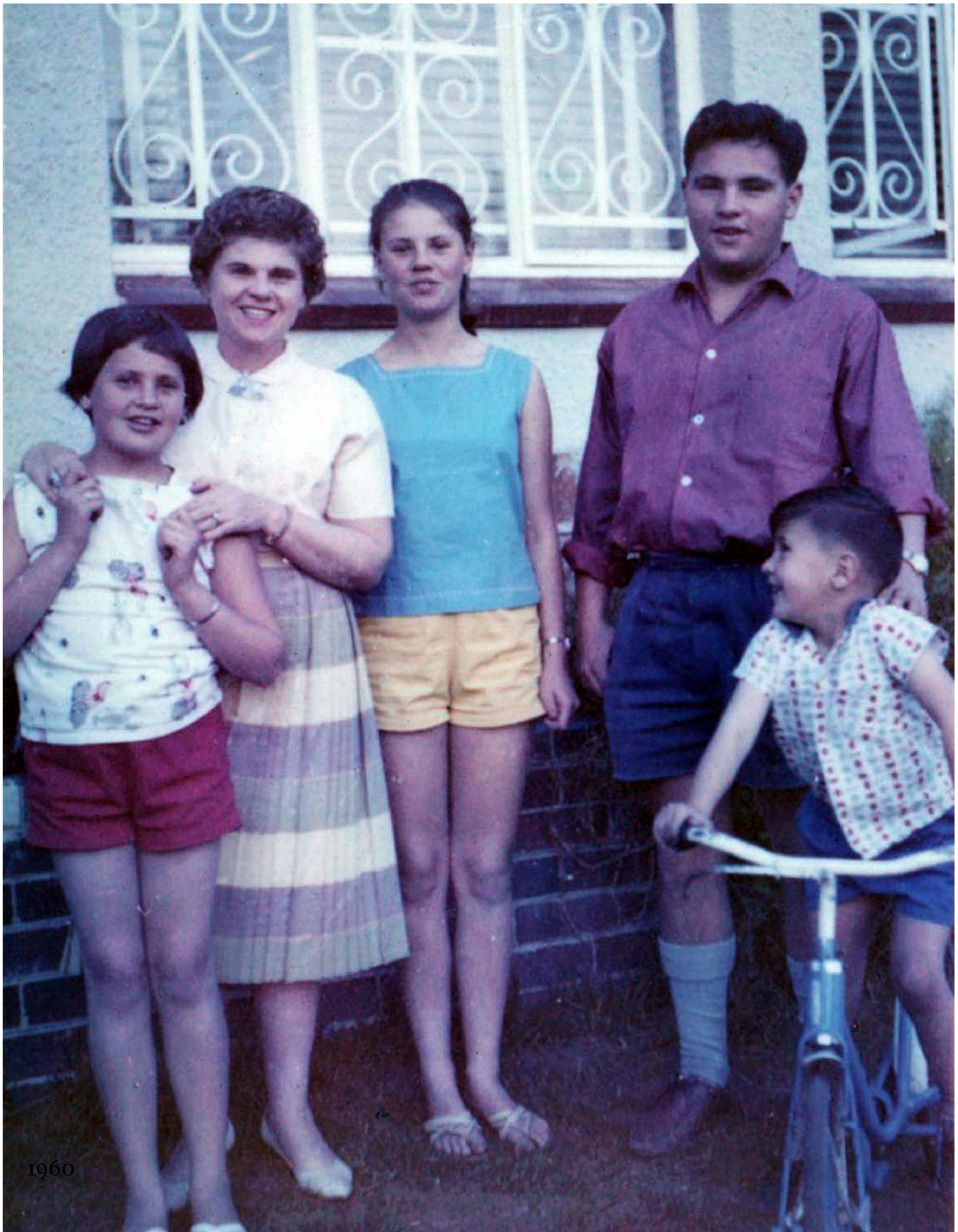
21 Rhodes Street, Witbank - 1957

tremendous bond with each and every one of them. Each was both very affectionate to, and fiercely protective of their Granny Pearl, often phoning her. Until a few days before she left us, she still conversed with them via Skype and video conferencing links. She is mourned by even the youngest of them. She always said she had eighteen great-grandchildren, as she regarded Jodie, Les' daughter as her great-grand-daughter too.

Pearl the traveller. Until four years ago, she had never let anything stop her from going abroad to visit us.

Pearl the immaculate Lady. Always smartly dressed, never a hair out of place. Even in Sandringham Gardens she had her hair done twice a week.

Pearl, our Mom. An incredibly tough lady who never let adversity get in her way. She had always kept going - supporting her family all the way, no matter what the circumstances.



1960



The last years were not easy for Mom, and losing her baby son, our brother Herman in 2012 was particularly difficult. But she bore this stoically, continuing to tell us how fortunate she felt to be surrounded by her wonderful grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Nobody had grandchildren who were cleverer or better looking than hers! We know, because she never stopped telling us!

We have received so many messages from people whose lives she touched. The eloquence of her friends, relatives and acquaintances give a poignant and accurate description of the woman who was our mother.

*Charles Abelsohn, her nephew from Israel.*

If it was difficult for us to comprehend the sad phone-call informing us that our beloved aunt Pearl had decided to call it a day. We can imagine how hard it must be for you to grasp that the matriarch of the Abelsohn family has passed away. We, the Cape Town Abelsohn's, had a special place in our hearts for our wonderful aunt Pearl, and indeed for her darling late husband Mo. We recall with affection those holidays in Witbank and also the car filled with family arriving from Witbank. We remember those Seder nights, with the phone calls between Witbank and Sea Point, the chief subject of conversation being how the kneidlach came out.

I personally remember with gratitude after my engagement to Vivienne and her return to Johannesburg when she was concluding her studies to be a Hebrew teacher, that it was Pearl and Mo who collected Vivienne from the Johannesburg station and shepherded her through the process even though they had never previously met her. Pearl was simply gracious, hospitable and extra-ordinary, an aishet chayil, a woman of valour who in the words of the Proverb, deserved the highest praise.

*From the children of Friends, and those who knew her as children*

I remember your mom and dad as very powerful role models. They were a loving couple and created a wonderful warm and friendly atmosphere in your childhood home. *Derek Gavshon*

We will remember Pearl for her graciousness, dignity and elegance.  
*Hermione (Blum) Isakow.*

I for one, cannot forget how marvelous both Pearl and Mo were to me when I was but a mere teenager, at a boarding school in Witbank (in the 1960's). They were always warm and generous, kind and considerate and were there for everyone - *Michael Kallenbach, London*

*From Ernie Bernitz, her brother in law, now in Sydney. Australia*

I first met your Mother before the war - she was visiting Johannesburg as a debutante, and was staying with Auntie Frieda Bernitz. I was a little boy with a metal calliper on my leg. At that time the age difference between us was vast. But Pearl was so friendly and kind. I never thought this lovely lady would end up being my sister in law. Pearl's passing away was not unexpected, yet when it happened, we were shocked and grief stricken. In my opinion it was because she was such an integral part of our lives. Charles told me so many people remarked that Pearl was a remarkable person; that is an understatement; she was an outstanding person.

I have not seen Pearl for eight years, and in recent years we have been unable to speak, but we spent hours talking when she was able - the conversations were mainly of events in the past, during the war, her anxiety about Mo in Italy at the front. She spoke of her undying respect and love for Kate and Herman, she expressed regret at the past existence of disagreement both in her family and ours, she absolutely abhorred any animosity between anyone, and moreover never ever carried any grudge against any person. She was a pillar of strength backing Mo when he was battling to start a venture, as I am sure she protected her family. Not a day has passed since her passing away that I haven't spent some time just thinking about Pearl, and some incident which carried such an important message. Your Dad had the same qualities, together with his most fantastic friendly nature and sense of humour. Despite the vast distances separating you all, I am sure you will stay as close as you have always been, to honour the memory of your fantastic parents.



*Valerie Shikli, daughter of her lifelong friend Jessie Esakowitz, Israel*  
 She was such a wonderful person in so many ways and held a very special place in my heart as my second mom. I always see her in my mind's eye giggling together with my mom and I love that memory! The two of them really shared all the ups and downs of their lives in such a unique relationship.

*And from her brother, Dr Leonard Esakowitz, Glasgow*

What an impressive person! Unchanged in so many ways since my earliest memories of her. The same optimistic, cheery, warm and loving attitude even through the toughest of times - and she had many to deal with. Always fun to be with and to chat to. Never forgot anyone's birthday! More like a sister than a friend to my parents, and definitely like family to us. A wonderful home maker. I fondly remember the gatherings at your home in Witbank with Mo and Pearl such an impressive double act! A unique woman who will be greatly missed.



*Gerald Abelsohn – her nephew from Sydney*

Death is inevitable but mom appeared indestructible. We are so very sad that the last link is broken, and the era is closed. She had a very special place in all our hearts. A most caring, loving, open, honest, kind wonderful person - words cannot really describe her persona. Visiting her was always such a pleasure and inspiring experience, and she always brought my own dad to life by talking about him and their relationship. She and Jack were so very close, and together they personified what kindness in a family meant. That has always been the way your families have been together - very special indeed.

*Ria Mann, lifelong friend from Witbank*

Your precious Mom was a dear and very close friend of mine, but oceans separated us, and we could not share the autumn years of our life together. The last time I was in Johannesburg, I had the privilege of seeing her. Her infectious giggle and the beauty of her soul, together with the gentleness of her speech, was as I always remembered. I loved her dearly, and have very fond memories of our Witbank years.

We started playing Bridge, as young brides, and shared genuine moments of true friendship. I could go on and on.

*(Aunty) Hannah Shein, lifelong friend from Witbank*

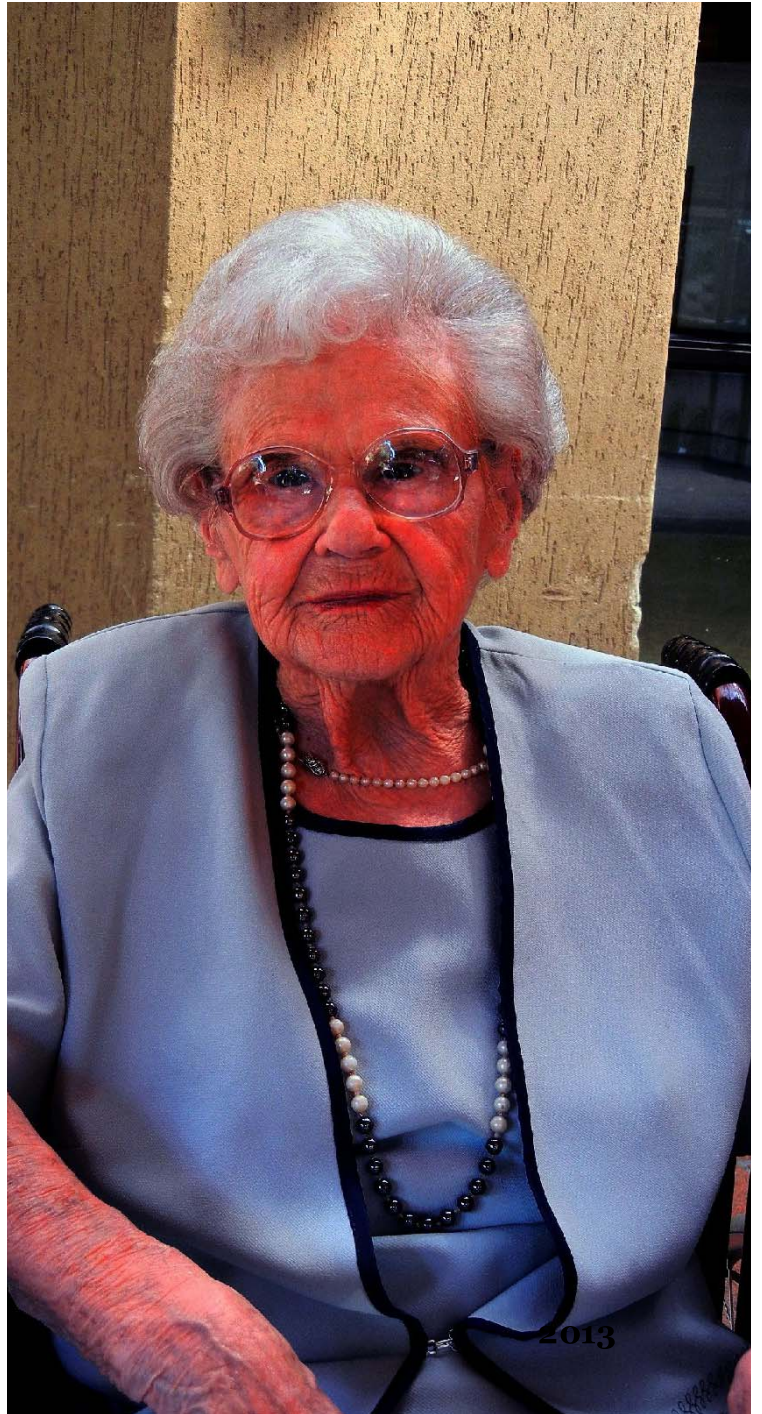
I am so saddened to learn of the death of your dearest mother, my friend of so many years. She was just one of the finest people I had the privilege of knowing from the time we met when we moved to Witbank in 1950. I remember how we shared the upbringing of our children in our small town. The closeness of our lives made those years all the more pleasant and at times so much fun. I vividly remember how desperately ill your mommy was before late Herman was born. And with what courage she fought back to continue her fruitful life. I often recall how she was at last able to sit outside your house in Plumer Street – a very frail seemingly ‘old’ lady. The next thing I heard she took out her car and went to the hairdresser! - I believe that was the turning point in her period of recovery.

*Shirley and Rufus Abelsohn, her nephew from San Diego*

Rufus and I were so saddened to hear of the loss of Pearl... not only was she an aunt, she was our friend. When I came into the family, your mom and dad welcomed me and treated me as if they had known me their whole lives. I will never forget your dad, enveloping me and saying "now you are one of us". Your mom and I spend a lot of time together when Joe died and Evelyn was busy with her boys. We had the best time as shopping buddies. I loved visiting her at 301 Gravenhage and loved that she was always laughing. Rufus always talks about the times he spent at Witbank and remembers them fondly.

*Henry Bernitz, her nephew from Johannesburg*

Aunt Pearl meant a great deal to me, particularly in my formative years, when her guidance and comforting was so important to me. I'm sure her soul now rests in the peace which she so richly deserves after all she has endured. They don't make them like her any more - a truly remarkable woman in so many ways and an example of a true lady and mother to more than her own.



2001

2013

### ***Some memories of our Friends from London***

We will remember Pearl from her visits to England on the occasions of your wonderful family Simchas.

I only had the pleasure and privilege of meeting Pearl twice. I was very much struck then by Pearl's warmth, kindness and intelligence - as well as a great affection for the Esakowitz family and, of course, huge love of and pride in her own family.

I will always remember your mother with such affection, she was such a dignified lady who had so much pleasure in coming to stay with you and Ruth and your ever growing family. My mother and I enjoyed many lunches and delightful afternoons with her and Ruth.

We will remember Pearl with deep affection and always enjoyed meeting up with her when she visited Bushey. She was very elegant and lovely.

We will remember her as a very sweet and intelligent lady who we got to know well over the years.

### ***The Laughter***

Pearl was such a very special Lady. I cherish some wonderful memories of time spent with Pearl and Mo. And so many special giggles shared with Aunt Kate, my Mom and Pearl. *Willie Swilling, Mo's cousin from Cape Town.*

Pearl was a very special person, my Mom loved Pearl. I can picture how they used to shriek with laughter when they were together all those years ago. *Richard Malkin, son of her close friend Mercia.*

I remember you all with much affection, Uncle Mo's booming voice - 'Ramondez' he called me and Pearl's lovely infectious laugh. Those huge family Seders at our Grannies at Rhodes Street. *Raymond Stein, cousin.* She was a very special lady with a delightful sense of humour. I remember how she and your dad laughed and enjoyed life together.

***I miss you. I hope, as you did Mom, that you have been reunited with Dad.***

***Charles, May 2013.***

### ***Her Grandchildren's memories***

We all have the most amazing memories of Granny – she made us laugh, she took such pride in all her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and we have all been lucky to have her in our lives for so long. She is now at peace and we should be grateful for the amazing legacy she has left – a united family. We often talk about the fact that people think we are odd because we choose to spend time with our family. I would rather be odd and have you all in my life, than be like so many feuding families. *Tracy*

I too have that horrible deep sadness that I will never see her smile or talk to her again, but also so much gratitude that I got to have Gran in my life for such a long time, and my children's too. She was such a remarkable lady, has given us all so many gifts and so many wonderful memories. We all had a Grandma who gave us so much, taught us so much and today should be a day where we remember how lucky we all are. I am certainly thankful to be part of such a wonderful extended family. *Melanie*

It's a sad day but we are comforted by the fact that Granny is at peace and no doubt reunited with all her loved ones. She touched so many hearts - I am moved by the number of people who've told me how they made special visits via Johannesburg so that they could see granny, and how she appears to have been like a second mother to others. Even my friends have stories they remember of her! She's truly a remarkable lady and we are all very privileged to have her as a role model. *Adi*

I have been thinking of all our cousins a lot since receiving the sad news about Granny Pearl. I am sure you will agree that we were all so privileged to have such a wonderful gran. She gave us all so many happy times and laughs and taught us all so much in her special way. *Lauren*





## **Granny Pearl – Our Mother**

Our mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, Pearl – the youngest of six siblings, doted upon, loved and spoiled by them. Mum was truly the precious pearl of our immediate and extended family. She was little in size, but huge in stature – as evidenced by the love and respect everyone had for her.

Mum was always a lady – she dressed immaculately, and always had her hair perfectly groomed. We remember when she and our late father were in Donkerhoek in the Eastern Transvaal, she schlepped Dad to Lydenburg (100 km. round trip) so that she could get her hair done! Even when there was no one else about to see her, she needed to look good for herself and Dad! Mum was always a loving mother, grandmother and great-grandmother - warm, caring and giving. We remember her sitting with us as we studied for exams at high school in Witbank. She would stay up late and get up early to make us coffee. She enjoyed babysitting her grandchildren, and could often be seen sitting on the floor with them playing cards or games! She did have a secret gambling streak, and could occasionally be seen enjoying playing the slots with some of her grandchildren. She was so proud of her four children, her eleven grandchildren, and eighteen great-grandchildren. Just this past Wednesday, when I called from Toronto to chat to Mum, she asked, as she usually did, “and how is your beautiful little granddaughter?” She then went on to say how every one of her grandchildren and great grandchildren were beautiful and clever and how lucky she was! They all, in turn, were so proud and fond of their granny Pearl.

Widowed at the early age of 60, Mum took control of her life, and assumed responsibility for all the tasks that Dad had taken care of. Even until just a few years ago, she systematically organized all of her papers and possessions. She knew exactly where she had placed all her documents, bank statements etc. She always had an uncanny memory for numbers – she could rattle off telephone numbers, bank account



numbers and even her credit card numbers.

Mum was always accepting of others and whatever came her way – her maxim was always – if you do not expect anything, you won't be disappointed! She always maintained a positive disposition and showed and amazing resiliency to challenges.

Mum was a feisty and spunky woman. This feistiness was evident whenever she faced adversity, as in her several falls that resulted in broken limbs and often required surgery. She was up and walking as soon as she could. She always worked hard at her physio to get back her full strength and mobility.

Mum often took on causes – like nagging the city to build a raised hump roundabout on Illovo Road near Thrupps, so that pedestrians could safely cross the street. Yes, every time drivers have to slow down to go over that bump, they have our Mum to thank!

Mum was a great cook and baker, and certainly the best maker of party sandwiches that she loved making for her bridge friends, and kneidlach for her children and grandchildren, which she proudly made by the hundreds.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgenstern of Tomashov (the Kotzker Rebbe) said "A bird that you set free may be caught again, but a word that escapes your lips will not return". Mum always modelled for us that it is important to always say only good things about others. She said – if you have nothing good to say, rather say nothing.

Mum was always a great supporter of causes and charities. She worked for WIZO from 1946 when she and Dad moved to Witbank. She was recognized by WIZO with an award for long service. She was an ardent Zionist, and for many years, until she was well into her 80's, Mum could be found with her WIZO group at the Hypermarket, Checkers in Balfour Park, or in Killarney, helping to run book sales for WIZO.

We used to tease Mum and say that she was like the queen's Mum. This was so true at Craig and Lauri's wedding in September 2010 and at the recent Bat and Bar Mitzvah's of Jenna and Jason. She smiled, she glowed, and was so proud of her family. She basked in all the attention she attracted as the grand matriarch of our family.

Mum was always a valued and good friend, and there are many people who were proud to call her their friend. She always made others feel valued and important. Mum was loved and respected as "Granny Pearl" by family, friends, nieces and nephews now scattered around the globe. E-mails have been pouring in from people whom she touched with acts of kindness. Friends and family have been sharing how Mum and Dad positively impacted their lives by showing them care, concern and kindness.

Mum always inspired us with her courage, her strong moral values, her wicked sense of humour, and her sense of fun and zest for life. We loved the warm smile of welcome and big hugs when we came to visit her, our phone chats with her, her questions about her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and her wise advice to us. Mum, we will always love and remember you. You lived your 95 years to the full. We hope that you and Dad can now rest, or have fun, together. We, your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren all feel blessed to have had you for so long, to have been loved by you and to have learned from your wisdom.

***Shana and Jill - May 12th, 2013 – Mother's Day***



