

Appendix vii



Ruby Gifter died in January 2000 – I delivered the eulogy at her cremation.

Eulogy for Ruby Durban, 16 January 2000

Ruby was not only my elder sister. Whilst Morris and Janie were tending to their other children – Jocelyn and Leslie – and guiding their business and social lives in the difficult years of the late 1920's, Ruby was my surrogate mother.

She nursed me through childhood illnesses; she wheeled me round the Madeline Road precinct where we lived; she was my third parent until she married and moved to what to us was the remote Northern Transvaal.

There was always a special bond between us, and the memory of those early years was part of the fabric of the past that remained with her almost to the end. When I last saw her in October she recalled my bout of diphtheria when I was three years old, gave a satisfied sigh and said "You're looking much better now. You were very sick you know!". I was indeed – in 1929!

Ruby not only had a tremendous zest for life; it was combined with determination to excel, with a powerful desire to help others, and with a great need to be recognised and loved. She succeeded beyond all normal bounds in all of these.

She was a fine, accomplished musician – the youngest pianist, at 16 or 17, to perform as a soloist with the Durban Symphony Orchestra at the City Hall. She joined *Habonim* and rapidly rose to *Madrigah*. She took to playing squash and was soon Club champion and played for the Province. She was a born raconteur and a superb comedienne who was

the show stopper in many shows at the Durban Jewish Club. She amassed a large group of devoted friends. She was a powerful and unique and unforgettable personality.

In due course she met Cecil Gifter, a debonair mining man with whom she moved to Pietersburg. Jennifer and Gillian soon arrived and she was a devoted mother, involved with and increasingly proud of their looks, their capabilities and their achievements, and ultimately delighted with David and Phil whom they brought into the family.

Cecil Gifter was a warm-hearted, generous, lovable but difficult character whom, as a 13-year old, I was enchanted to have as a brother-in-law. He made and lost fortunes with equal ease. Life with him was not always easy for Ruby and the small Jewish community in Pietersburg in the heart of the inhospitable and not always friendly platteland, was very different to the warm life of Durban.

It was however not at all surprising that she soon became a vital part of that community, heading the Women's *Chevra Kadisha*, the Zionist Organisation, the Union of Jewish Women. On a broader front she was active in United Party politics and in all of the wartime activities of a country town. The Gifter farm on the outskirts of Pietersburg was a haven for Commonwealth and free European Royal Air Force trainees, many of whom became close friends.

The family ultimately moved to Johannesburg where Ruby became its financial mainstay, working in the family wholesale business. Holding a full-time job, and bringing up a teenage family was not easy, but there was never a complaint, or a weakening of her love for her children, of her buoyancy, of her friendships, her hospitality, which Hedda and I and her many friends often enjoyed.

Life for Ruby did not get easier. Jennifer and Gillian married, and like so many children of so many of our families, emigrated to Los Angeles. Cecil had a serious stroke which left him totally dependent on her. She decided, wisely, to move here to Durban, to be with her old friends and family, in her nostalgic early environment.

She of course missed her close family, but again, until her mind weakened, she was still the old Ruby, the Ruby whom everyone who knew her remembered. The mental picture that we all have is not of the Ruby wasting away in Beth Shalom, but of the Ruby who made such an indelible impression on everyone who knew her – vibrant, capable, funny, generous, in love with life, with her daughters and their husbands and children, and with her friends.

We shall all miss that Ruby – she is an irreplaceable part of our lives.

Finally, I know that she would want me to thank you all for your

friendship and support; to thank her family for their love; to thank her long-time friend and companion Nancy Dlomo for her devotion; to thank Pam Kearsy and Matron Mathew and the Beth Shalom staff for their loving and compassionate care; and to thank all of the new friends that she came to know and love in Beth Shalom for their companionship.