

SONNY GUBBAY

(interviewed by Jan Walters)

Q: Today is 24 March 2025. My name is Jan Walters and I am a committee member of the Jewish Historical and Genealogical Society of WA. Today I have the great pleasure of being able to interview Sonny Gubbay. First of all, I will start off by asking you when and where you were born?

SG: I was born on 14 December 1934 in Singapore.

Q: How many siblings did you or do you have?

SG: I had four siblings, three sisters and one brother. The only ones who are still alive are my younger sister, Rita and me out of the five children of my parents.

Q: What are your siblings' names?

SG: In order of birth rank, Sophie or Simcha; Jack or Jacob; Rachel, myself: Sasson, or Sonny (which is the name I go by) and my youngest sister, Rita. Her original name was Amy because we had run out of grandparents' names. The first 3 siblings were born in Macassar, Indonesia.

My father was there mainly. He was in partnership with a man called Khalifa, a Jew. Khalifa I think means "coat" in Ivrit now. He was in partnership with him and eventually bought the practice. He lived in the Dutch East Indies with my mother, whom he had married late. What happened is that he was there by himself and at the age of 35 was interested in getting married at last. He decided that he would ask his cousin in Singapore whether she knew of anybody. She said, "yes, I have two ladies who are interested" – that is, my mother and my mother's sister.

They met with my father. First of all, my aunt, the younger daughter of my grandparents, met with my father. I think he saw her and decided he didn't want her. He saw my mother and at the end of the day they were engaged. They were holding hands by the end of the day and they married shortly afterwards, a few weeks later on 26 February 1926.

Q: This meeting took place where?

SG: I think it took place in Indonesia but it could have been in Singapore. I don't know. My mother was actually in Puna, India, where she lived since she was 8 years old, coming from Baghdad. In Puna she managed to get educated at a Catholic school until she was 18. This Catholic school was called St Helena's High School.

My mother said she wanted to give the school a gift because my grandmother had asked the principal of St Helena's High School if she would possibly allow them a remission of fees. I don't know if it was partial or total fees. That is my mother and her youngest sister because they didn't have any money. They were given that remission.

When my mother was dying, before she lost her power of speech, she said she wanted to give them a gift. After she died I sought out St Helena's High School. I told them about my mother. I still have a copy of the letter I wrote to them. They wrote back and I sent them some money. That was how she felt about that Catholic school. My daughter actually went and visited that school and saw the little Indian girls there.

Q: That's amazing. Sonny, when was your mother born?

SG: She was born in 1902. She was actually 12 years younger than my father. She was also related to Mrs Kitty Sayers, that is my father's cousin, who was also my mother's cousin, but they didn't know each other. They weren't related to each other but they were both related to Mrs Sayers, Aunty Kitty. She got them together. They lived together until my father died.

Q: Where was your mother born?

SG: In Baghdad. Both my parents were born in Baghdad.

Q: And their parents?

SG: Their parents were also born in Baghdad. Both came from very religious families. The religious orthodox were not like the Ashkenazi orthodox. They didn't have this ultra-orthodoxy. If you were orthodox you were orthodox. You kept all the laws. They had a different type of rules and regulations. They were very strict, extremely strict but it wasn't meshuga frum. They only became meshuga frum in Israel later with the orthodox parties who have the balance of power in the government at the moment in Israel.

Q: When your father went to India did he go on his own?

SG: He went by himself. He wasn't married and at that stage was only 19 years old. He was given that chance.

Q: Did his parents stay in Baghdad?

SG: Yes. My father was one of 10. He was the third son and probably the leading one in the family who supplied my grandfather, who was a rabbi. There were eight boys and two girls. He was probably the one who earned the most money and was able to send back to his father and sustain the family for many years.

In those days the rabbonim were not paid; it was all honorary. He had his own synagogue and he was the main person in that synagogue, the main rabbi. He had to earn his own living. I don't know what he actually did but he was a merchant and my father traded with him. He never saw him again after he left at the age of 19. He never saw his father again but they did keep in correspondence. There was a letter he used to read every now and again and tears would come to his eyes, according to my brother, from his father who died relatively young.

We believe, and so does my brother and others in the family, that we are Babylonian Jews. In other words, we were the ones who stayed behind when Nebuchadnezzar took us to Babylon and we didn't go back to Judea, the Holy Land, the land of the Israelites because we decided to stay there and make good. We were the ones who wrote the Babylonian Talmud and many of the other writings.

Q: Did any of your father's siblings come to Australia?

SG: No. Some of them visited. I have two cousins who came to Australia from my father's side. They were related to my father's second oldest brother who stayed behind. He went to Israel after the terrible uprising in 1948 when Israel was declared a nation. It was pretty cruel program. The family was left penniless when they went to Israel at that time but two of his children came to live in Sydney. Firstly one of them came to live in Perth. My father looked after him for five years while he got a chemical degree and went on to become a successful perfume and soap manufacturing chemist. My father was the only sibling to settle in Australia.

Q: What about on your mother's side? How many siblings did she have?

SG: My mother had six siblings. One died in childhood, probably from appendicitis by the sound of it. She was the second youngest of the residual five. The oldest was my Uncle Jack who died here in Perth. He was married to Rose Marshall. Rose Marshall's brother, that is my uncle-in-law, was the Chief Minister of Singapore before Lee Kuan Yew. When they achieved independence, he stood down for Lee Kuan Yew as he became the first prime minister.

That was one of the reasons why we came to Australia because David Marshall had prior knowledge that the Japs were coming and he said, "Go". He sent his family to Perth first and we were the second Singaporean family to come here but the first to really come here as interested in the Jewish community.

- Q: You mentioned Jack. What was his surname? This was your mum's maiden name?
- SG: Minie. We are related to one of the chief rabbonim in Israel. Munev is a very important name. We are probably related to Paul Muni, the actor.
- Q: Jack came to Perth?
- SG: Yes, Jack came to Perth.
- Q: Did any of the other siblings from your mother's side come?
- SG: No. All the other siblings stayed wherever they were, in different places. The sibling my father rejected – my mother's sister – developed tuberculosis and went to Switzerland. In those days they used to go into a sanatorium. She had these operations where they collapsed her lungs and did all sorts of things. Eventually she was almost virtually cured. She lived a natural life. I have sort of lost contact with the others.
- Q: When did your parents actually move to be in Singapore?
- SG: In 1933, that is after my father had been in Indonesia for about 30 years – you see, the first three children were born in the Dutch East Indies in Makassar in the Celebes, which is now known as Sulawesi. That is the first three children. My father then thought it was important, firstly to have the children in a Jewish atmosphere because there were very few Jews in Makassar at the time and also for their education. They therefore migrated to Singapore in 1933. That was at the end of the depression.
- He was about the only person I've heard of who made a fortune during the depression. For some reason he served in the Dutch Army and was shot in the head. He had a bullet wound. He had a scar where it had grazed his head. My brother remembers when he came back. As far as I know he didn't actually see action but he was doing an exercise using live ammunition.
- They came to live in Singapore. In Singapore two more children were born. That is me and my younger sister. We are the only two who are surviving today. I was born in 1934. In Singapore my father joined a committee to look after migrants who were escaping from Germany.
- One of them was Rabbi Porush who came to our house for shabbat. When my father went to Sydney with me and my mother, when I turned 14, Rabbi Porush honoured us with a kiddush thanking my father for being one of the people who assisted his transfer to Australia. I think Mr Bekhor was on that committee.
- My father wanted to become British and tried to get Mr Bekhor to agree to be a referee but he refused. He said, "We are Singaporeans and that is what we have to stay" but my father and he were not on good terms after that. They still remained sort of friends. My father did become British eventually. Anyway, we migrated to Australia in 1940.
- Q: How old were you then, Sonny?
- SG: I was five. One of the people whom also the committee helped was Dr Bergina and his wife. He was from Italy. He had a daughter called Dorothy Bergina. Dorothy married a man called Parker and they had a son called David Parker who was the deputy premier and who ended up in gaol.
- Q: Joe Berinson helped him to get out!
- SG: That's right. I don't know how your Uncle Joe survived. I was telling Max Kamien yesterday, Joe was the only person who remained pure amongst all those thieves. He just would not be involved. They helped these people to come to Australia. Parker was actually Jewish.
- Q: Yes.

- SG: His mother was Jewish, Dorothy Bergina. I remember Dorothy from Singapore. She was really beautiful and had beautiful plaits. I had never seen plaits in my life before and I was only 4 or 5 years old. I saw this very, beautiful woman. She came to Perth.
- Q: How did they help people get from Singapore to Perth? What did they do?
- SG: I don't know how they helped them but they did sustain them when they were in Singapore. They facilitated, gave money, and probably helped to pay passages and so on. My father was on this committee. They helped people escaping Germany mainly but also from other parts. The Berginas came from Italy. G-d knows how. He was actually a friend of Dr Einichovichi. He was an ear, nose and throat specialist. Dr Caldera was a friend who was also Jewish. He was the professor of Dr Eini from whom he learned his ear, nose and throat craft when he was in Italy. He was born in Odessa.
- Q: Can I just go back and ask you what you remember of your few years because you were only five on leaving Singapore.
- SG: I remember everything.
- Q: Good. Did you go to a Jewish kindy?
- SG: There was no Jewish kindy. I went to a kindergarten called King's School Kindergarten. It was only meant for white people but they allowed me in. My mother was fairer than my father and she used to do all "the business" whilst my father was in business. He did very well in Singapore by the way. I went to that kindergarten with all the other Jewish children who were around. Eric Ezekiel was with me. Do you know the Ezekiel family?
- Q: I know of them.
- SG: Don Ezekiel?
- Q: Was he an optometrist?
- SG: Yes. He was my first friend really, Eric, who was also my best man later for our marriage 65 years ago. I remember everything. You can ask me anything.
- Q: Were there any Jewish schools at all for your older siblings?
- SG: No.
- Q: Not for any age?
- SG: No.
- Q: Was there a Hebrew school?
- SG: No, but my father engaged the son of the chassan of the Meyer Synagogue. That is the Oxley Rise Synagogue which Menasseh Meyer was instrumental in building. There were two synagogues then as well. My mother and father belonged to the Oxley Rise group where most of the Baghdadi were – and there were plenty of Baghdadi Jews in Singapore at the time. He engaged the son of the chassan, Ray Meyer. I don't know if you know about Raymond Meyer.
- Q: No.
- SG: He did much of the hard work for the Kailis family. He did all the heavy business in Perth for the Kailis Brothers, the fisheries people. He never married although he had a liaison with Hope Snider, Mr Snider's daughter, but they never married. He never married in his whole life. He used to come to our house every shabbat, Ray Meyer. He was my brother's tutor and my sister. He taught them Hebrew engaged by my father. There was no school; you just had a tutor.
- Q: Did they have kosher meat there?

- SG: Absolutely.
- Q: Was your family kosher?
- SG: Absolutely.
- Q: Did they observe shabbat?
- SG: 100 per cent.
- Q: Totally shomrei shabbat?
- SG: Yes, totally shomrei shabbat.
- Q: Did you go to shule every Saturday?
- SG: No, not totally shomrei shabbat. Yes, I went every Saturday. Wait, I was five. I didn't start going to the synagogue regularly. My brother went regularly but at the age of five I used to go for festivals, I used to go when my father was called up, I used to go for simchas torah. I remember carrying a mini torah about this big and I remember kissing all the torahs that we had in the aron kodesh. I had to be carried by my sister to hold me up.
- Q: To kiss the torah. Did your father go every Saturday to shule?
- SG: Every Saturday. On the Sunday after my barmitzvah in Perth, friends of my parents came to our house. My father had taught me how to put on tefillin so I was the first person to have a tefillin on my arm to be done by the rabbi on the day after my barmitzvah, which was on the shabbat. On the day after he came to the house and my father put the tefillin on me and I said a couple of blessings. I wore the tefillin until I was about 16.
- Q: This rabbi came specially from Singapore for your barmitzvah?
- SG: No. It was Rabbi Rubin-Zacks. I was 5 years old when I came to Australia.
- Q: The rabbi was Rabbi Rubin-Zacks?
- SG: Yes. When my nephew was born, he was also one of the first to have a pidyon haben, so he introduced that to Perth. It was probably a common practice, it was a special ceremony. I remember the Cohen was George Cohen, that is, the father of Graham and Tony Cohen. He took five shillings from Hymie Bensky to buy my nephew from him. I remember that at the end of the ceremony George Cohen gave the five shillings back to my brother-in-law and I thought, "That's wrong. He should have kept it."
- Q: It has to be a proper transaction!
- SG: He gave it back.
- Q: Not so kosher.
- SG: Not so kosher but Keith Bensky married twice and both times a Jew, so that was okay.
- Q: Did some of your siblings have a barmitzvah in Singapore?
- SG: No, because my brother came here when he was 11. His barmitzvah was done in a Sephardi sort of way and my father sort of conducted it at the synagogue with Rabbi Ruben-Zacks. It was a weird sort of thing. At this barmitzvah I remember we had a party. I remember my first day at Hebrew School – and we didn't get here until 5 September 1940.

We left Singapore on 22 August 1940 and it took 2 weeks to get to Perth because we called in firstly at Wyndham where we took on cattle and we then went to Port Hedland, Broome and Carnarvon. I remember catching a train into Carnarvon. After Carnarvon we called into Geraldton where my mother bought me a Meccano set, number 1. We then came to Perth. We stayed in

Forrest House for a couple of weeks where my brother had measles. We found a place to live in Lawley Crescent in Mt Lawley.

Q: What number?

SG: 81A.

Q: My parents lived at 79 Lawley Crescent.

That was my father's father's property, 79 Lawley Crescent.

SG: 81A was owned by a lady.

Q: Was that Mrs Cousins? There was a Mrs Cousins next to us but I'm not sure.

SG: Her name was Mrs Cuthbert. We were scared of her because she used to come and have a look and say, "Your children are writing on the wall" and so on. You know how there used to be a fireplace and on the fireplace there was a poker and a brush and a little spade to clean up, well somebody put the brush in the fire and it burnt all the bristles of the brush. I think that was the last straw for that lady.

Q: When we were living there, that was not rented out.

SG: We were in 81A. I don't know where 81 was but it was a very big property. I lit fires. I lit a fire there twice.

Q: As you do!

SG: I think we had to leave there when I was seven. We were actually told to go, so we went to live in Nedlands until we found a place back in Mt Lawley. We then lived at 8 North Street.

Q: Close by.

SG: Yes, close by. From 8 North Street we went to 17 Melrose Crescent in 1942. That's when my father bought his house. He bought five houses and that's how he lived. He bought five houses and rented them out. The Rappeports were one of the renters and that's how my mother became a very dear friend of the Rappeports.

Q: Which family was this?

SG: Raymah Schenberg married Philip Rappeport. It was Louis who we really knew well. He had three marriages altogether but I can't remember the first one. He married Deborah Rosman. He died while she was his wife.

Q: Yes, that's right.

SG: He had these five houses and that's how he sustained himself. He had managed to get out enough money but most of his stuff was in Singapore.

Q: He couldn't bring that out?

SG: No, not until after the war. We sold our house in Singapore in Nassim Road for I think 28,000 Singapore dollars, which would have been - - - at that time there were 7 dollars to the Australian pound, so it would have been 4000 pounds. Now that particular property is worth 40 million.

Q: Your father is turning in his grave!

Mignonne: And our children can't get over it.

Q: He did well to get so many properties anyway?

SG: Yes, he did.

- Q: Did he do any other work besides managing the properties?
- SG: He had an office. He brought in a “sleeping partner” to a place in Piccadilly Arcade. He went in with Mr Amber. He used to call him “Umber”. Mr Amber sold cloth. What do you call those cloth merchants? He used to have these big rolls of cloth.
- Q: Like drapery?
- SG: Yes, he was a draper. He used to sell all these materials. My father bought half of the business and probably got some of the profits. Amber would have received his salary as well out of that. The rest of the profit would come from the house rentals.
- Q: Did your mother remain at home?
- SG: The only work my mother did outside the house was voluntary. She belonged to National Council and WIZO and stuff like that. She always felt badly because she thought everybody else was superior to her. She found Rosetta Luber a wonderful person who made her feel that she was important as a person. The other person who gave her a lot of courage was one of the Breckler daughters.
- Q: Was that Hannah Breckler?
- SG: No, Hannah Breckler was married to one of the Brecklers. There were four Breckler siblings. She was a Rosenwax, Mrs Rosenwax.
- Q: Vera?
- SG: Yes, Vera. She also was very supportive of my mother. These two very extraordinary ladies, who spent all their time giving to the community, taught my mother to do things and to feel that she was part of the community.
- Q: Why did she feel the way she did?
- SG: Because she was the first Sephardi person in Perth. Don’t forget, apart from the Marshalls who didn’t have much to do with the Jewish community – except that Sonny Marshall married Mr Grochowski’s daughter, and that didn’t last - - -
- Q: Your family was the first family of Sephardi origin here in Perth?
- SG: Yes.
- Q: Did your family ever go to the shule in Palmerston Street?
- SG: My father didn’t go there. I went there. I used to go to Habonim from the time I was nine. I must have been barmitzvahed, one day when I was hanging out outside the front of the shule (PHC), either before or after a Habonim meeting, or before or after Hebrew School or something, all of a sudden a man in a top hat appeared in a Rolls-Royce and he said, “Come here, come, come.” He said, “I want you to come to the other shule.” I said, “Why is that?” He said, “Just come, come.” I think I and another person went into the shule. They wanted a minyan because it was somebody’s yahrzeit. I went there.
- That was the first time I went. On Yom Kippur we used to wander around there to see what was going on. That’s the only time. I have been there about three or four times during my whole life. My first time was when I was drafted.
- Q: Who was in the Rolls-Royce?
- SG: I know it was one of the founders of that shule, I think. They wanted to be more frum or less frum or something.
- Q: What primary school did you go to, Sonny?

- SG: I went to North Perth Primary School with a lot of Jews.
- Q: How many kids would have been in your class?
- SG: Well, there was Pauline Ritcher, Ann Atlas, Alan Lewis, Harry Gunzburg, Gerald Simonsen, myself and I think another one.
- Q: Out of how many kids? How many kids would have been in that class?
- SG: About 55.
- Q: Oh my goodness. In one class?
- SG: Yes.
- Q: So about 10 per cent were Jewish?
- SG: Yes. Joan Silberman was the other person. Of those, Ann Atlas, Pauline Ritcher and I won scholarships to Modern School. Alan Lewis and Harry Gunzburg won entrances to Modern School. So five out of the seven went to Mod.
- Q: And from such a big class.
- SG: I still have the scholarship photo somewhere. I would say that of that class about 15 went to Modern School. We had the biggest contingent of all. It was a very good school and I learned so much in that year from the 6a teacher.
- Q: Do you remember the headmaster?
- SG: Mr Charles Moore.
- Q: Where were you living at that time?
- SG: The headmaster was Charles Moore and Ernest Smith was the 6A teacher. We used to call him "Smut".
- Q: Where were you living at this stage?
- SG: Melrose Crescent, Mt Lawley. I went originally to Inglewood School when we first came here. From Inglewood I was transferred to Dangin which is near Quairading. Do you know where Dangin is?
- Q: No. I am just going to pause the tape here. Let's begin again. You were talking about being at your primary school and then you went on to Perth Modern School.
- SG: We were evacuated to Dangin during the war in 1942 when the Japanese invaded Darwin. They came down as far as Geraldton. We didn't know about that. We didn't even know about Darwin but we were told that the Japanese were near. My parents were very frightened because they had already left Baghdad, India, Singapore and now in Australia they were threatened again.
- I remember air raid sirens and so on. At this stage I was at Inglewood Primary School in Second Avenue, Mt Lawley and we were evacuated to Dangin. That's important for you to know because there were plenty of Jewish families who went there with me. All my family went, the whole five of us. We didn't all last the distance but it was a pretty bad experience.
- I will tell you who were the Jewish people who went there. There was Anne and Marie Atlas – that's Tamara – there was Shirley Rappeport, Phyllis and Rose Golding (later Rose Kessell). I can't think of anybody else. My three sisters went and my brother for a short period of time. There were the Zinners. Do you know the Zinners?
- Q: I know the name.

SG: Hannah Zinner actually started this humanitarian group, Amnesty International, in Western Australia which is now pretty anti-Semitic. She moved away from the Jewish community. I think her father was one of the founders of the Liberal Jewish congregation. She became Hannah Downey later.

We stayed there for the duration, for about a year before it broke up again. Things were easing up and there was a good resistance against the Japanese. The Americans came so we were able to come back to Perth. That's when we moved to Melrose Crescent.

Q: Did you see your parents during that period?

SG: My mother came several times. She stayed with the Sames who lived there. There was Phil Same who was married at that time to Rhodda Cohny. My mother used to stay at their house. She came about three or four times to visit us. It was hard because she used to have to get a lift I think with Mr Rapoport. He had a truck and she used to go in the back of the truck. It was 99 miles away. It would take a few hours on bumpy, country roads at that time.

Q: Where did you stay when you were in the country?

SG: We stayed in a hostel there. It was taken over by 80 or so people who were evacuated. The school was called Lawley Ladies College and was run by missionaries who had been to China. Their mother was 82 years old and was the oldest person in the world at that time. She loved the boys. She had a galah in a cage and we used to talk to her and the galah. I went to the country school and my name is actually inscribed where the school was, along with all the other kids who went to that school.

Q: You said it was not a good experience at all?

SG: No.

Q: For what reasons?

SG: Well, there were privations. We were hungry all the time. We used to have to catch rabbits. I never ate rabbits because it wasn't kosher. I think we did eat meat. One of the boys shot four Port Lincoln parrots – or maybe 28s – with his ging. There were four boys but I wouldn't eat it because I thought it wasn't kosher. My mother said, "You could have eaten it; it's a bird. It's not a bird of prey; you could have eaten it." I felt very annoyed about that.

We couldn't even eat eggs because there weren't any around. There was a man who kept turkeys and were occasionally allowed to eat turkey eggs. The boys were favoured. There were only about six of us and the rest were girls. We were siblings of the girls.

Q: Did you feel any anti-Semitism there?

SG: Never, but I think there could have been because I was very badly behaved at that school. I used to make the class laugh all the time. We had first, second, third standards in the same classroom. I think fifth and sixth were in the next classroom. We had trainee teachers and I used to interrupt the class and crack jokes. Whenever they said something which I could turn into a joke, I did and the whole class used to laugh. It drove the teachers mad.

One day, at the end of term, I was called by the headmaster - the headmaster taught Years 5 and 6 - to his room. He said, "you have been badly behaved. Put your hand out." He gave me the cane, which got me across there, on my left hand and I am sure he broke that bone because there was a bruise there for months. I didn't tell anybody because I was ashamed I had been beaten up. I said to my mother, "I am not going back" and she said, "Why not?" I said, "I am not going back; I am not going back" and I never did go back. That was lucky. He didn't warn me. He didn't say, "If you do this, I will cane you". I was the only one who got the cane and I am just wondering because I was the only dark person there. It might not have been anti-Semitism but he might have known I was Jewish.

Q: He might have been a bit racist or something?

SG: Yes.

Q: When you were in primary school did you go to Habonim then, or was it later on?

SG: I went to Habonim almost from the first day. Habonim started here in 1944, not in 1948 or whatever they say. They just don't know. I wrote an article and told everybody that it started in 1944. It started with Ben Hanaman who was 20 years old and he was a doctor. He was brilliant and entered into medical school when he was 16 and did a 5 year full-time course with no holidays because they were rushing doctors through at that time.

He came to Perth to do his residency because it was 1944, still during the war. He came to Perth to work at the Infectious Diseases Branch which was later called Shenton Park Annexe. It was an infectious diseases hospital before it became a rehabilitation hospital. He was there looking after patients with poliomyelitis mainly. There had been several outbreaks of poliomyelitis.

He started Habonim here. It had obviously started in Melbourne and Sydney and he introduced it here. The people he recruited were Joe Berinson, Max Walters – those are the two I remember well – Sol Woodman, Morton Woodman. They were all fiercely Zionist; they were all extremely interested in politics, particularly Max Walters who was a real intellectual even as a teenager. He was actually one of the madrichim and so was Joe. I never had anything to do with Joe but Max was a madrich for a while.

Q: One of your madrichim?

SG: Yes, one of my madrichim. The main madrich was Sol Woodman. Sol came second in the State in his Leaving exams and so did his brother, Morton. They were brilliant boys; top students. They both won exhibitions for their Leaving. In those days there were very few exhibitions. Nowadays every second kid gets an exhibition or a certificate. They both came second in the State. Sol did a Bachelor of Science and worked as a chemist but was not interested in what he was doing because he was going on Aliyah. He went on Aliyah after going to hachsharah in Shepperton, Victoria.

Q: Yes, they did their training there.

SG: They had animals and so on.

Q: Like a kibbutz kind of environment?

SG: Yes. They called it hachsharah. The very first five Jews to go to Israel were Michael, Henry, Max, Eva and Betty.

Q: Which Max? Do you remember their surnames?

SG: No, I don't remember their surnames. There were five of them and we called them the five halutzim. They were the first of the Australian Jews to go on Aliyah. They came and visited us when I was in the dux class at Perth Hebrew School. Your mother, Ethel Berinson, was my teacher for a year. She had good discipline actually; she was a good disciplinarian. Not all of them were. She made us behave ourselves. I can tell you about the Hebrew school if you like.

Q: All right. Let's stay with Habonim first. How long did you stay in Habonim?

SG: I was in Habonim until I reached Leaving year, so I would have been about 17. I was a madrich. I was a madrich from 15 years old for 8 year old children. I had a book, which I may still have somewhere, on the background of each child. I can tell you who was in the Habonim group. There was Fay Dzienciol; a girl called Green. She was probably Greenberg and she was deaf. She had a hearing aid and great big box you had to carry around. There was Sharon's late husband, Brian Snader who was 8 years old. She is a now a partner of Graham Cohen.

SG: Colin Rockman married Donnelle Bercov and Donnelle had a sister called Sharon. Sharon was married to Brian Snader. There was also a boy called Ben Krug. I was actually a second year medical student and so called the medical officer at a Habonim camp when Ben Krug grazed his leg and I applied peroxide and Mercurochrome, but it got infected. Someone told me later that his father said he would never send his own dog to me to be treated.

There was Moishe Lipovich, who was even a crook in those days. I think he ended up in a very bad way too. Moishe became a doctor actually.

Q: How long were you a madrich for?

SG: A couple of years.

Q: Did you go to meetings for your age group as well?

SG: Yes. We still had our own age group. That's what happened. When I was 17 I was still a madrich – maybe I had stopped doing it because I was doing my Leaving. We had a meeting at Sol Woodman's house. That was next to where the Bensky's had a furniture place in Beaufort Street. The Woodmans were actually tenants of the Bensky's. I don't know if they paid any rent as they never had any money. The Bensky's were very good that way.

We had a meeting at Morton Woodman's house and he said I had to leave because I wasn't going on hachsharah and I wasn't going on Aliyah. All the others said they wanted to go on hachsharah. I said, "No, I want to do medicine and practise as a doctor in Israel. I didn't want to go on hachsharah. I wanted to be a doctor and not on a kibbutz.

Q: So you were evicted?

SG: Yes, I was evicted but I was allowed to go back and be the cook for the next camp. I was actually the cook. Mrs London was there. We always had to have an adult female at the camp to make sure that the boys and girls didn't sleep together. What do they call those people?

Q: A chaperone. We have done Habonim. You mentioned you went to Hebrew school and that my mother was one of your teachers.

SG: The first day at Hebrew school there were two tables. There was one table where the kids were a bit slower than at the other table. They were both manned by Miss Berade. One was Miss Fat Berade and other one was Miss Thin Berade. One was fat and one was thin.

Q: They were both Berades?

SG: Yes, they were sisters. That was my introduction to Hebrew lessons. When the rabbi came in everyone had to stand up. There was a fly buzzing around the window. All the windows had - - -

Q: Flywire?

SG: Not flywire. There was actually netting, cyclone wire, so people couldn't smash the windows and break in. This blowfly was flying around. Rabbi Ruben-Zacks was a bit strange. He caught the fly like that with his hand. I said, "I eat flies." The rabbi said, "You eat flies?" "Yes, I eat flies." So he squeezed the fly in his hand and opened his hand. The fly was dead – and this is true – and he held it up to me and said, "Eat this." I said, "All right." He held it up to my mouth, like that, and I went, "Urrr." He said, "So that was the first lesson." That was a lesson to me to not show off because I was a terrible show off all the time. Terrible.

I delivered a speech on the 25th anniversary of the shule and we invited the premier at the time, who was a friend of Rabbi Freilich, Dr Gallop. He later resigned because he got depressed. He was a Labor premier and a good premier. I think I have my address there somewhere.

I remember the sounds, b a ba b o bo bar bo bar be and then alephbeis, , gimmel and so on. Then loo loo loo loo, until the end. In second year, I can't quite remember who taught me – I think it

was Sol Levitt, Nissan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz. I remember I learned that from him. Sol Levitt taught us for a while. He was only about 17 at the time. Then there was your mother. She used to make us read as fast as we could. I am a bit dyslexic for Hebrew.

Q: Only for Hebrew?

SG: Not for English but for Hebrew, yes.

Q: You were the dux of the Hebrew school, weren't you?

SG: No. There was your mother and she used to threaten that if anyone misbehaved that she would call the rov. That was Rabbi Ruben-Zacks who at that time was still Reverend Ruben-Zacks.

Q: You didn't mess around with him?

SG: No. He used to like complete decorum when he was in the classroom. If you were seen doing anything wrong or the class was talking he would say, "Neck rest" and everybody would have to go like that and you would have to sit like that until he said you could put your arms down. That was Rabbi Ruben-Zacks.

Q: How many times a week did you go?

SG: I went on Saturday after shule. It started at 12 o'clock and it ended at 1 pm and then I caught the tram home. Sunday it started at half past 9 for the boys – and I taught haftorah after learning from Mr Zeffert. I taught haftorah for a few years.

Q: How old would you have been at that time?

SG: Until I went to Adelaide at the age of 18, so between the ages of 15 and 18 I taught haftorah. I then went to Adelaide and taught at the Hebrew school there.

Q: This was being a little bit dyslexic in reading Hebrew?

SG: Yes.

Q: You can't have been very dyslexic in Hebrew?

SG: No, but I taught haftorah. I taught them the trop. I am one of the people who knows the correct trop because I learned it from Mr Zeffert and never forgot. The reason I didn't forget is because I taught it myself for years. Half past 9 the boys started; at 10 o'clock the school started but I can't remember when it finished. It was probably at 12.

I remember that when I was in the year 2 years away from the dux, I was now at school with Anne Atlas, Pauline Ritcher, Alan Lewis and Harry Gunzburg. All those kids who were a year ahead of me at Hebrew school because I started late. I started when I was five whilst the others had started at the beginning of the year so I was a year behind and I really didn't like that.

I spoke to my mother. I remember I was very upset with my mother. I said, "I want to be in that class with the other kids." She took it on board and she told my father. My father went and spoke to Rabbi Ruben-Zacks and said, "I want my son to go up into that class." The rabbi said, "Okay." He knew I was badly behaved but I went in that class and I came fourth in that class at the end of the year after three girls. I was the top boy. Those three girls were very smart.

The following year was the dux class. The dux was Shirley Segal but then her family was from Israel and they spoke Hebrew. She was smart, Shirley Shilbury. She married Lud Shilbury. By the way, her father came to see me as a patient. It was the only time I accepted "schwarz" in my whole life.

What happened is that he came to me and spent an hour with him. I can't even remember what he had wrong with him. At the end of the time he said, "How much is it?" and I said, "My secretary will sort it out." I was just going to charge him the rebate, which in those days was nothing. He

said, "No, I want to know how much it is." I said, "Nothing, nothing." He caught me out and he said, "I want to know how much you charge the most from everybody." I said, "I charge \$20." He pulled out \$20 and he gave it to me. I said, "I will give you a receipt." He said, "I don't want your receipt. Put it in your wallet." So I put it in my wallet and that is the only schwarz I ever got - \$20. He said, "It's worth it" and he walked out.

Q: Isn't that beautiful?

SG: Anyway, there was Shirley Segal who came dux. The proxime accessit, that is the person who came next to the dux, was Anne Atlas and Cynthia Cohen. They came equal second. Third, who was actually fourth, was Pauline Ritcher. All those girls were very smart. I came fourth after them but I didn't get a medal. Adrienne Silbert came sixth. She came after me but she got a medal. Why?

Max told me afterwards that they all had a meeting together and they decided that I shouldn't get a medal because I was badly behaved. I used to clipped behind the ear repeatedly by Rabbi Ruben-Zacks. He used to seek me out for making jokes. He couldn't stand it. My mother complained but she didn't get very far.

Q: Were you ever involved with the Zionist Youth League?

SG: No, not really because I was in Adelaide. I started a Habonim group in Adelaide. I had a Habonim group. There were Paul and Leon Zimmitt. Rena was older, that's right. One of them, Gus Hine's daughter, became a judge. She is or was a judge in London. They all ended up being remarkable people. They were all just kids.

Q: You went to Perth Modern for five years?

SG: Yes. I came 15th in my Scholarship exams.

Q: You then went on to do medicine?

SG: Yes.

Q: And you did that in Adelaide?

SG: Yes.

Q: How many years were you in Adelaide, Sonny?

SG: I went to Adelaide for 4 years and then came back and started the medical school here in Sixth Year.

Q: When was that?

SG: 1957.

Q: I remember somebody else doing the same thing.

SG: John Lore.

Q: Ike Raiter?

SG: No, he was - - -

Q: He came back and finished here?

SG: Yes, that's right. Ike was in Melbourne.

Q: But he came back and finished the last couple of years here?

SG: Yes, that's right. Ike was in Melbourne. I think he was married to Laura when he was still an optometrist.

- Q: No. I think he married her after he had gone to Melbourne.
- SG: I was at their wedding. It was the first outdoor wedding that Rabbi Ruben-Zacks had conducted. Mrs Eini was insistent that they have the chuppah outside. The rabbi acceded because he couldn't say no to her.
- Q: It was the hottest day in history, just about.
- SG: It was a very hot day; I remember that. It was before I met Mignonne. I didn't meet Mignonne until the Purim dance 68 years ago.
- Q: Sonny, from that wedding do you remember who was the best man?
- SG: Ike's best man would have been Sol I suppose.
- Q: I saw a picture of the wedding and Joe Berinson was actually at the head table with Jeanette. Ike or Laura thought he may have given the speech but may not have been best man. He was definitely at the head table.
- SG: I know that Joe Berinson was a very close friend of Ike. They both lived in the same street, Glendower Street. They were very close friends.
- Q: You came back to Perth and finished the first part of your medical degree?
- SG: Yes.
- Q: When did you go into neurology?
- SG: When I was a medical student I knew I wanted to be a physician and not a surgeon. In fact, if medicine was surgery I never would have done it. I just didn't want to work with my hands. You can be trained: I could have been trained. I just wanted very much to do the magic which Dr Cohen did – that's B.C. Cohen. B.C. Cohen was the "aunty" of Dick Farago's wife.
- My parents worshipped him. He used to come to the house when I was ill. My mother was a very anxious lady. When I had the measles he'd come and examine me. He'd turn to my mother and say, "He's going to be all right. Don't worry" and my mother would be a changed person. She was worried, but as soon as the doctor came and said I would be all right, she was transformed. That happened repeatedly.
- It happened also with Dr Sam Finkelstein. He used to come. He called me Tiger. He'd say, "Hello, Tiger." I told that to his son, David Finkelstein. David said that he called every child Tiger and not to worry about it. He called me Tiger. He'd examine me, knock on my chest and listen to my heart and look at my face and down my throat and he'd tell my mother, "Don't worry, he will be all right" and she would be transformed.
- I wanted to be like that. That was what I thought I was going to be. Ever since I was 7 years old I wanted to be a doctor. I decided to do neurology. When I was in Fourth Year I was introduced to patients for the first time, I thought, "That's really what I want to do. I want to be a physician." I then did my physician training and neurology was my weakest subject. I thought, "I want to be good at that so I can be good at everything." I did neurology because it was a challenge and then it turned out to be what I REALLY wanted to do. It just worked out that way.
- Q: At what stage did you meet Mignonne?
- SG: Mignonne was 17; she had just turned 17 and I was in final year medicine where I had come back from Adelaide to start medical school in Perth with 15 or 16 others. There was a Purim dance. That was Purim 68 years ago in 1957. I saw Mignonne there and asked her for a dance. I have never looked at another woman since then, never.
- Q: How beautiful.

SG: Never, ever again did I go out with anyone else. 68 years but we were a bit young at that stage. She was at university and so was I. She was the head girl of her school and was doing very well at university as well. We decided to get married long before we were officially engaged. My parents forced us to make our intentions clear, so we did. We married 65 years ago. That was lucky.

Q: To do your neurology did you have to go overseas?

SG: Yes.

Q: Were you married at that point?

SG: Yes. We were married without children. Our first child was conceived on the boat to England. In those days, to travel by boat, third class, was cheaper than going by plane. Plane was enormously expensive, so we went by boat. I didn't travel as the doctor at that stage because we went without scholarships. We just went.

I knew what I had to do. I was told by Mercy Sadka what to do. She was quite a fine woman. I fell out with her because she was impossible – you know, like all great women! She was the person who guided me every step of the way and was my biggest helper to get where I was.

I spent 3 years in England: 18 months at Queen Square which was THE place to go to in the world at that stage, the National Hospital. I then spent 18 months in Newcastle Upon Tyne, where she told me to go. My boss there later became the number one neurologist in England. He was given a peerage because of his wisdom. I have all of his letters from him. He was the one who encouraged me to write my book and do my thesis.

I then went to Boston and worked with some remarkable people there. I was away for 4 years training in neurology.

Q: Did you have other children during that time?

SG: The two boys were born in England, which is handy because their children can work in England. Both boys are English born, both Paul and Adam. They were born in England and it means they can live in England without passports or anything. I mean, they are they are Englishmen.

I said to Bush House, which was Australia House, "This is no good. I don't want my children to be English; I want them to be Australian." The guy said, "Sorry, they are Englishmen for the rest of their lives." I said, "But I want them to be Australian." He said, "Look, you can make them Australian right now" and I made them Australian straightaway. As it's turned out, it's a good thing.

Q: You went to Boston and your daughter was born when you came back to Perth?

SG: Yes. She was born in the first year we were back.

Q: Can you give me the dates of their birth?

SG: Yes. Paul was born on 20 September 1962. Adam was born on 19 February 1964. Anna was born on 27 November 1966.

Q: Today is 1 April 2025 and I am with Sonny Gubbay. My name is Jan Walters and I am continuing an interview with Sonny I began about a week ago. Sonny, thanks for agreeing to continue with the interview. Just to start off, I think maybe we will talk a little about you as a neurologist. You wrote some books. I know you were encouraged to write a book when you were in England. Is that right? As a thesis?

SG: I spent 3 years in England and a year in America. I came back to Perth. One of my MD thesis examiners said I should write a book on the thesis. He was also my boss. He happened to be one of the examiners I think. I can't remember now. I said, "Oh, it's too much" but after about 18 months I relented.

I asked Mercy Sadka, who was a colleague of mine, to speak to John Walton, who was later Lord Walton, and tell him that, yes, I would go ahead and write a book if he still wanted it. He wrote back to me and said he did, so I wrote it.

Q: What is the title of the book?

SG: It was called "The Clumsy Child". Here is the book. That's a monograph.

Q: I read some of the articles in this book when I was practising as a physiotherapist in West Perth Child Development Services. We had photocopies of some of the articles which would have come from this book. It was from "The Clumsy Child". What a small world.

SG: There you are.

Q: That was written in 1975?

SG: Yes. I wrote my thesis in 1971/72. It was accepted in 1972 but I received the honour in 1973 from the university. I then wrote this book in 1975 but I didn't launch it because it happened to be my son's barmitzvah and I didn't want to take anything away from him.

Q: What made you go into that area – the developmental co-ordination disorder?

SG: When I left Perth originally Mercy Sadka said to me that there were certain deficiencies in Western Australian neurology and, because I wanted to do neurology, I should consider that I should bring back paediatric electro-encephalography and paediatric electro-myography, which I did.

When I was in Newcastle - I had already done adult neurology – I told John Walton that I wanted to be exposed to paediatric neurology as well. When he introduced me to the Professor of Paediatrics, there was no paediatric neurology in England at the time.

I went to the Professor of Paediatrics, who had actually coined that term "clumsy" and had written a paper, and I just continued on from that and did my thesis on that. It was one of the projects I did as a clinical research fellow working in Newcastle Upon Tyne. That's how I got exposed to that.

Q: When you came back to Perth did you practise both with adults and children?

SG: Yes. That was never done before. It will probably be increasingly done now because there are so many things which actually span the two – such as neuro-genetics. There are a lot of conditions which either can occur in childhood or adulthood that have the same genetic thing. There is actually somebody in Perth practising in both specialities. It's quite a rare thing; it's not going to be very frequent but it's certainly going to exist.

Q: You were the first person in WA to do that? What about in the rest of Australia?

SG: In Perth there was a person who was not a neurologist – he didn't train in neurology. He did a term of neurosurgery. When he came back to Perth as a physician and paediatrician he gravitated towards neurology. Most of the neurological issues which paediatricians couldn't handle would go to him. He wasn't a neurologist but was a physician in general medicine.

When I came back, the two of us established the first department of neurology in Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH). Now there about 11 consultants there in neurology. We established that. Mercy Sadka bought a machine and started to do paediatric electroencephalograms. She

knew a bit of paediatric electro-encephalography. She was trained in the whole spectrum but she stopped doing it as soon as I arrived.

She had bought the machine only because she knew I was coming back. On the day I came back I rang her and she said, "You've got 20 EEGs waiting to be read." The next day happened to be my birthday so I think I went in the next day and read them.

Q: So you were a pioneer in that area?

SG: Yes.

Q: How amazing.

SG: Absolutely.

Q: How much of your practice was with paediatrics as opposed to adult neurology?

SG: I did sessions at Princess Margaret Hospital, Royal Perth Hospital and the Gairdner Hospital and at Hollywood Hospital. I gave up Hollywood Hospital as soon as I could and I gave up Gairdner after 12 years so I only had the two other jobs.

In the hospital I was doing equally paediatric neurology and adult neurology but in private practice it was mainly adult neurology. I did do paediatric neurology and had quite a few patients sent to me. The paediatricians were still rather jealous of their territory to do neurology and they didn't send their easy cases like epilepsy and headache to me. Gradually they did.

Q: They realised you had expertise that they did not?

SG: Yes, that's right. When they saw I was reading the EEGs for them and telling them what to do, if they were busy enough they would send their patients to me. A lot of them did but were only three or four paediatricians in private practice. Now there are tons of them. A lot of GPs don't do paediatrics now because you take your children to a paediatrician.

Q: If you can get into one.

SG: Yes, if you can get into one.

Q: You started the paediatric neurology at PMH?

SG: Yes. I worked with Peter Silberstein, yes.

Q: He was the person who had started already who had been a paediatrician?

SG: Yes, he was a general paediatrician with an interest in neurology but there was no department of neurology. When I returned to Perth I was a neurologist and was the second person trained in paediatric neurology in Australia because I had spent a year in Boston doing that.

Q: Was he not reclassified as a neurologist eventually?

SG: Yes. He was classified as a neurologist when I said to him, "I'll nominate you to be a neurologist after a few years" and he accepted. I was the one who nominated him

Q: I can remember when I was a student at PMH?

SG: I nominated him. I thought it was about time that I did and he was happy to be nominated. People forget that. They think he was the first neurologist because he was there first. That's fine; that doesn't matter anymore.

Q: Did you bring in new things in adult neurology which hadn't been done before?

SG: Electro-myography.

Q: That didn't exist here at all?

- SG: No. I introduced electro-myography which is a very important part of the diagnosis of neuro-muscular disorders such as motor neurone disease and muscular dystrophy and so on.
- Q: Did you have to train people to use the equipment?
- SG: Yes, but now of course the training is much more rigorous everywhere in the world. You have to have a certification. I had minimal teaching exposure and was actually self-taught as I went along as well. In those days you self-taught because there was no one. As a pioneer you just read the literature and said, "Oh, I'll do that too" and so on.
- Nowadays that is just not on. You just could do it. It's the same with the EEG. I came back and did the EEG. Now you have to have certification to be an EEG reader or EEG reader in paediatrics or an EMG practitioner in paediatrics or an adult. I had both and was allowed to do both until I retired.
- Q: Did you introduce any other things beyond things you have mentioned?
- SG: I just introduced new concepts in neurology. I didn't introduce a new subspecialty. Some did come later – that is in Evoked Potential studies which are now not done because of MRI. Certain things were displaced by MRI. There was no CT scanning when I first came back. We just used our hands, our eyes, our ears, our intelligence and a physical examination.
- To investigate we used skull x-rays and spine x-rays. We used air encephalography where you pumped air into the head and it filled up all the spaces and you could see the brain in outline but was very indistinct compared to what an MRI can do now.
- Q: I don't know if you have told me already – and forgive me if I am asking again – what year did you retire?
- SG: I retired altogether at the age of 82.
- Q: Let's go back to some of the things I thought we could elaborate on. You mentioned that your father owned properties so he received rent from the properties and he was the silent partner of a business. Did he have free time to do any communal activities and, if he did have any free time, did he pursue any either Jewish or wider community activities?
- SG: When he came to Australia I am sure he did. He was very involved. I can't remember.
- Q: Might he have been involved in the PHC?
- SG: He was in Rotary and he was also in the Masons. He was a Freemason in the Jewish group. Actually, it wasn't a Jewish group but it was predominantly Jewish. He was in that and he gave a lot of time and effort into what they had to do – in both Rotary and Freemasons. He had been in Rotary in Singapore so they welcomed him in with open arms when he came to Perth. Freemasons – I think one of the Community leaders said, "Why don't you join?" so he did.
- Q: PHC and those kind of things not so much? He attended the synagogue but was he ever on the board?
- SG: No. He used to attend the meetings and I remember Mr Edelman saying to him one day, "If you nominate me, I will nominate you" because he wanted to get onto the board. He said, "Mr Edelman knows what to say to everybody." Dad was a very strong Zionist and was a major donor of UIA or its equivalent at the time and I think he was also on its committee.
- Q: That's fine. You told me your mother was involved in WIZO and National Council?
- SG: Yes.
- Q: Was your mother involved in other groups not to do with the Jewish community – the wider community?

- SG: Probably not. She was pretty busy with five kids.
- Q: Can you tell us about your involvement in the community and the wider community?
- SG: Last time you asked me, as a boy I was a madrich with Habonim. You asked me to remember the names and I just couldn't but they have come all back to me. In Perth Habonim, the group I was in included Sol Woodman, Ziva Arkin, and Shirley Shapira as Madrichim. The members included Stanley Catts, Pauline Rticher, Anne Atlas, Alan Lewis, Joan Silberman, Harry Hertz, Pearl Cohen, Anne Kessell, Yedida Bercove, Pearl Rossman, Marie Levy. As a teenage Madrich, in my group there were Laurel Rockman, Faye Dzienciol, Harry Stern, Brian Snader, Rena Greenberg (with hearing aid, battery and mother) Ben Krug, Moishe Lipovich, Leah Kuhaupt, and an Israeli girl called Rivka. The Adelaide Habonim, which I started included Hetty Erlanger, Helen Hines, Paul Zimmet, Leon Zimmet and others. I was also in cubs but I wasn't a leader in that.
- Q: Was that the Jewish cubs?
- SG: Yes, it was the 56th Wolf Cub Pack in Australia, which was the Monash Cub Pack. Arkela was Pearl Helfand who later became a Levin. She was magnificent. The Baloo, the second in command, was Raymah Schenberg, who married Phil Rapoport.
- Q: That was held in the Monash Hall?
- SG: Yes.
- Q: I can remember that as well as a picture of Monash in that hall.
- SG: When I first joined, we were sitting outside the Monash Hall – for some reason we couldn't get in at that time. Before I got my uniform I remember looking at a penny, a brand new 1943 penny, whilst I was sitting there so it must have been 1943 that I was in the cubs. I passed a few of their exams and got little tabs to put on my shirt but I wasn't a sixer, a seconder or a senior sixer.
- Q: After you finished your studies with neurology and you came back to Perth, you would have been a very busy practitioner. Did you get involved in any communal activities at that stage?
- SG: Not immediately. I could barely find time to go to shule and I had to work on Saturdays originally. I was very observant of all the Jewish holidays. I was very observant and made sure my children were observant. They all went to Carmel School. It was important that we kept it all up.
- Q: Later on when you were more established in your profession did you have time for communal activities?
- SG: Yes. I was on the board of the shule, altogether totalling over two or three decades for 14 years and I was on the executive for 11 years. I was the president for one year but I was acting president for another couple of years because Dan Mossenson wouldn't come to shule on Saturdays because he played pennant squash. I said I would act as the president.
- Q: Were there any other things you were involved in with the Jewish community?
- SG: I was on the State Zionist Council for a while. I was also on the Carmel School committee for one year only. I wasn't very happy about the way it was run.
- Q: The actual board itself?
- SG: Yes. What they were doing at that stage, being a person who was interested in children's welfare medically, I didn't like the idea of the kids sitting for the junior exam when they were 12 or 13 and 14 instead of when they were 15. I thought it was putting too much pressure on the rest of the class. There were a few kids who were smart.

- Q: This was in the early days when kids were put in the wrong class to keep the numbers right?
- SG: No. It was to show that we were a smart school and I didn't like the idea. I said, "That's wrong" and I spoke up with the headmaster and the board but they didn't think it was important.
- Q: Do you know what year that would have been, Sonny?
- SG: The year I was on the board was probably in the late 1960s somewhere. Les Edelman was on the board and he gave up at that stage as well. He had his own reasons. The board was run by Joe and Jeanette Berinson, Edward Pachtman, who made all the decisions and we were rubber stamping it.
- At that stage I was so busy with my practice. If I was less busy I might have pursued it. It was just pressure and I wasn't very happy about the way things were run. I was very happy about what they were doing but it was that particular aspect where I couldn't get any of my words in. I wasn't very articulate on those boards.
- Q: In the wider community?
- SG: In the wider community I was on committees. I was on the Medical Advisory Committee of Royal Perth Hospital, which is the top committee which runs the hospital. I was on the Electoral Committee. I was on the Medical Advisory Committee for 5 years. I was on the Electoral Committee for 6 years. We hired people. We looked at their CVs and chose this one and not that one, and so on. I did that for 6 years. That was a very good committee; I loved that committee. I didn't like the Medical Advisory Committee because that was a rubber stamp one.
- Q: Was the Electoral Committee for all hospitals?
- SG: No, it was just for Royal Perth Hospital.
- Q: To get the staff?
- SG: Yes. You got to know the backgrounds of lots of people. I was also on the Magazine Committee at Royal Perth Hospital. It was called "Servio" and was a journal at Royal Perth. I was on the committee of that.
- Q: What was your role with the magazine?
- SG: I just got people to write articles and I wrote an article or two myself.
- Q: Was that a medical paper?
- SG: No, it was about Royal Perth Hospital and about things around the hospital. I can't even remember but I probably have a copy of one somewhere from when I was on the committee. They still have Servio.
- Q: Okay.
- SG: I was never on a committee at Princess Margaret Hospital even though I offered to be on one at the Gairdner. I think I was on a committee of the Gairdner, yes, but I can't remember what committee it was. I stopped the Gairdner after 12 years because it was impossible to manage all the hospitals.
- Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism in your professional life?
- SG: No, not that I was aware of of any importance. I was aware of the fact that very few Muslims came to see me. That doesn't mean anything. That's not anti-Semitism. When they did, I went out of my way to be very nice to them.
- Q: There wouldn't have been many Muslims?

SG: No, there weren't. There were a few. I remember an Egyptian couple who came. They taught me a few words in Arabic. She was the patient. We talked a little bit about Egypt and about Israel and we both smiled at each other when we did. That was in the early days.

Q: Were you a strong Zionist?

SG: Yes, absolutely.

Q: From Day 1 of Habo?

SG: From the day I started at Habonim, yes. I was one of those who started Habo as a chanich. I wasn't a madrich because I was only 9 years old. That was in Fourth Standard when Stanley Catts said, "You've got to come along" so I went. I spelt Habonim "Hub...".

Q: Did you ever think of making Aliyah?

SG: Yes. I went to different institutions in Israel. I went to the Hadassah Hospital in Ein Karem. I went to the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. I went to Tel Aviv, where I should have gone really in the end. I went to the paediatric section of - - - what was that hospital called?

Q: As far as I know they didn't have one. They had wings. It may be different now.

SG: They had a paediatric wing.

Q: They had a centre in Beit Hakarem for children.

SG: No, it wasn't at Ein Karem; it was a paediatric one. Sorry, I can't remember. Anyway, I went to all these places and I decided that the best place for me to go to would be Jerusalem at Ein Karem and I spent 3 months there. During that time I realised that it was too late for me to go on Aliya.

I know that Paul, Mignonne and Anna all wanted to come but they were too young to decide anyway. Adam said he liked Australia so we would have had to pull him across. It was too late by the time I had decided: I was very Zionist and I did make the attempt by going to Israel and going to different institutions and asking if they had a place for me.

Q: Perhaps now we should talk about your children. We have discussed when they were born. Did they attend Carmel Primary School?

SG: Yes.

Q: From the beginning?

SG: Paul was the first to attend. He attended as soon as we arrived. We arrived during the Christmas holidays, so it would have been February 1966 when he joined the youngest group of the kindergarten, the Cuddly Koalas. The day he joined Dara Golinger said, "Oh, it's Paul Gubbay" because she knew him from England and he was immediately very happy to be there. That was his first day at Carmel. He stayed at Carmel, as did my other children, until high school.

Anna was going to stay. She stayed until Year 8 but then she didn't want to stay any longer because there were very few in the class. We decided as a family, because the two older siblings went to private schools, that we would send her as well.

Q: Were they happy at Carmel?

SG: I think they were all very happy at Carmel. They were all very happy students there. One of the problems was that there was a teacher there, Dobelski. I heard Joe Berinson say that he was wonderful because he had the spiritual nature but my children, together with most of the kids, thought he was a spoof. He was able to fly aircraft; that was his hobby.

He used to fly and he would tell the kids that he was much closer to hashem when he was in an aeroplane. Everything he said and did they laughed at.

Apart from that, the Jewish instruction wasn't taken as seriously as we did at Hebrew School. The Perth Hebrew School was really fantastic; really it was.

Q: Perth Hebrew School was fantastic?

SG: Yes, where your mother taught. It was a wonderful institution. I learned most of my stuff from Perth Hebrew School.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your kids. What paths did they follow?

SG: Well, they all became medical practitioners. Paul went on Aliyah after going on Machon L'Madrichei Chutz La'aretz. He went on that after he did his leaving (or TAE) and then decided he wanted to do medicine. He came back and did science for which he got a very high mark in his first year – four distinctions – so that put him into second year medicine. He didn't lose any time apart from the year he was on Machon. He did very well in his course.

The next was Adam who went directly into medicine. He did take 6 months off where he went to a kibbutz in Israel. Then there was Anna who wanted to go on Machon but Dick Joske, the Dean, said she had to get 20 marks higher than the cut off point and she only got 15 marks higher than the cut off point to get into medicine. I said, "Don't risk it" but I shouldn't have because it was easy to get in. She really did exceedingly well. All three wanted to get into medicine and all three got in.

Q: Did she do neurology?

SG: No, she did paediatrics. Paul is in general practice or family medicine in Israel; Adam is an obstetrician and gynaecologist in WA and Anna is a paediatrician. She is head of her department, which is rehabilitation. She married Simon Ericson, who is not Jewish, who is the head of his department in intensive care.

Q: She is head of rehabilitation at Perth Children's Hospital?

SG: Yes.

Q: Is her husband also at Perth Children's Hospital?

SG: Yes.

Q: Do they have three children?

SG: Yes.

Q: Are the children brought up Jewish?

SG: No. They were brought up nothing, except for their son's Barmitzvah, but I have tried to expose them to as many Jewish things as I could. They all regard themselves as Jewish but two of them have partners who are not Jewish. They still regard themselves as Jewish. The two who have non-Jewish partners – we were going to have Pesach here but Anna is now going to have it at her house.

Q: Adam lives here?

SG: Yes, Adam lives here. His wife converted orthodox and they have three children. They certainly regard themselves as Jewish but they all have non-Jewish partners.

Q: Is Paul more religious?

SG: No. All my children are secular Jews.

Q: Do Adam's children live here and go to Carmel School?

SG: Yes, they did go to Carmel. I think it's worth telling you this: they did go to Carmel. The oldest one stayed until Year 2. The next one stayed until Year 3 and the youngest one only went to Carmel Kindy. They all left simultaneously to go to PLC (Presbyterian Ladies College) after that.

I think one of the reasons was that Adam's wife, Liz, who became orthodox Jewish, felt unwelcome. She found it difficult, as did Simon Walters' wife. They just thought they were discriminated against because they weren't Jewish to begin with. I think they felt that rather than having to face a discriminatory attitude, they would take their kids out. I think that's true actually. It may not be 100 per cent the reason but I think it is a very important point to make.

I was going to actually speak to the Carmel School people one day – or someone who had some influence there – to tell them that I knew of this. I think on the other hand Justine Silbert, who already had a Jewish background, made the most of it and she understood what was going on and tried to help out. She is a wonderful lady. Justine is one of my favourite people.

Q: She has a heart of gold.

SG: She is 100 per cent and is a beautiful person. She tried to help out in the situation but you can't change people. You either have it or you don't. It is very difficult for the people who convert and I don't hold it against Liz.

Q: Did they bring up their kids Jewish?

SG: Yes, they did try to do it.

Q: Did they have a Friday night?

SG: They came here all the time. They didn't have Friday night themselves. We had Friday night here. We lit the candles here and the kids were encouraged to light the candles when they came. We did all the shabbat songs with the prayers and blessings beforehand. We did the wine, hamotzi and originally we would do the grace after meals but that fell by the wayside. They all knew it. The kids learned it off by heart from Carmel School without being able to read it. One of them in particular could do that.

Q: I presume you don't have Friday nights here very often anymore?

SG: We have it occasionally. Only in the last year or so we stopped because Mignonne couldn't cope anymore. She went beyond the time. The others obviously weren't prepared to have the family together, except once in a blue moon when barmitzvahs were on.

Three of Adam's children had barmitzvahs. They were all exposed to teachings, mainly by Simon Lawrence who is fantastic. I sat in on all the lessons. Rabbi Freilich taught the youngest one, Sophie, her batmitzvah because he didn't trust the other guy who was teaching at the time. He taught her to read Hebrew. The others could read Hebrew but none of them can now. I guess they are not interested. Maybe there is a spark and you never know what will happen.

Q: I am just going to pause this for a moment.

Q: We are on again.

SG: I should make the correction to say that Anna's children were not brought up Jewish but I did say they were all conscious of the fact that they were all Jewish. I should also say that Jack, who is the oldest in that family of three and the only boy, did have a barmitzvah and he was taught by Simon Lawrence.

Actually, as soon as Simon arrived I got him to teach Jack. Jack is very bright and he could actually read Hebrew by working it out. He is one of those people who can do it. When he read from the torah with the yad he knew what words he was reading and what each letter meant at that time. I don't think he would know now.

He could do all the blessings: baruchu et Adonai. He could do all the blessings before and after and he was able to do the Friday night service as well with the blessings for shabbat, the wine and so on. He did learn quite a lot but was only interested in his head rather than his heart. Maybe in his heart as well but, with the background he had, it would have been difficult for him because his father is a Catholic, although he doesn't practise Catholicism.

His father's parents are very religious and so he respects them. Sometimes Simon, Jack's father, even goes to church on Easter and so on, to please his parents in the same way I took Anna to the synagogue, to please me. Also she actually likes coming to the synagogue but she doesn't come.

Q: Do Adam and his wife or Anna get involved in any communal activities?

SG: No. Adam and Liz were members of the PHC but I think now only Adam is because Liz doesn't feel part of it. She recognises that she is Jewish and she is happy not to abandon that. She tells her children they are Jewish and she wants them to carry on with their children as being Jewish as well. It's a different type of Jewish feeling but she has welcomed that. We can't say what is going to happen to our children let alone our grandchildren.

Q: Absolutely. It's not in our hands, is it?

SG: No, not in our hands.

Q: I would like to know what you remember of your barmitzvah?

SG: I remember that when I did my barmitzvah I had already done my first haftorah. I was taught that by Mr Grochowski when I was 9. I think I did at least 12 or more haftorahs – maybe 15 – before I had my barmitzvah. I knew how to do my haftorah, which I could learn myself without any help, and I could also do my maftir by myself. I didn't need any help. I had already learned that from Perth Hebrew School teaching.

I still went to Mr Zeffert and had three lessons from him, which were very valuable. He talked to me about being Jewish and how to actually say, "I believe with perfect faith that the creator, blessed be his name, is the author and guide of everything that has been created" and so on. That's the thirteen principles of faith, which I knew already because I did it so often.

I can still recite the Ten Commandments today exactly word for word in English. He just told me how to recite them. I will never forget this, because I said, "I BELIEVE with perfect faith". He said, "No. You say, 'I believe with perfect faith' not 'I BELIEVE with perfect faith' because how can you believe that? It is your belief as a Jew, meaning that is what Jews believe in but it is not something you are 100 per cent believing because you don't have the knowledge to believe in it." That was very good. I learned that from him. It is not necessarily what Rabbi Coleman or Rabbi Freilich would say.

Q: But it makes sense, doesn't it?

SG: He gave me a couple of books: The Boy from Wilna, which was about one of the luminaries, the Lithuanian Gaon of Vilnius. The French one was Rashi so it wasn't Wilna but it would have been one of the other ones. I won't guess. I received as a barmitzvah present "Why I am a Jew" by Edmond Fleg, which was a very good book written for kids. He gave me a few books anyway.

Q: He had an influence on you?

- SG: Yes, he had an influence on me even though I only went there for three lessons for my barmitzvah. As I say, I already knew everything. He would correct me on certain things which were not right but I would have got away with it.
- Q: Because you had been doing it for a while.
- SG: Yes.
- Q: Could you have taught your grandson his barmitzvah?
- SG: I helped him a lot. Simon gave him a tape and he learned from the tape but he also learned from me. I used to teach him. I helped him with the blessings as well and showed him the actual torah readings so he could read without vowels or punctuation.
- Q: You did share with me some of the history of Mignonne's family so I have some background there. Mignonne's mother, Annie, was quite an exceptional woman from what I have read?
- SG: Yes, she was.
- Q: She looked after two siblings Pearl and Essie who were disabled?
- SG: Yes.
- Q: She would have done that for quite some time?
- SG: She did it for a long time until eventually she couldn't manage them and they went into the Home of the Good Shepherd. They were made to work by the nuns in the laundry or whatever if they were capable of doing anything. She visited them every week and used to take them home.
- Q: What disabilities did they have?
- SG: The oldest one had a mental disorder. I think she was probably quite intelligent but she was schizophrenic. The younger one was disabled. She had some form of neurological problem I actually had the opportunity of seeing her, examining her. She had a neurological syndrome which made her disabled mentally and physically. She was very sweet and could carry on a conversation quite well. She wasn't able to participate in ordinary life.
- Q: You should have been around earlier to help!! Annie was quite a bit older than her husband. She married David?
- SG: Yes.
- Q: From the information you gave me, it seems she was 5 years older than he was?
- SG: Yes. Probably actually 4 years.
- Q: She was born in Geraldton. Is that correct?
- SG: Yes.
- Q: When did the family come back to Perth?
- SG: I don't know for sure. It would have been about WW 1 or a bit later. I know that my mother-in-law helped her father – that's Mignonne's grandfather – to run a grocery shop in St Georges Terrace, Perth next to the Treasury Building. From the point of view of family to come, they would need to know this information.
- Q: Absolutely.
- SG: I think she left school very early. She might have done her Junior but she left school prematurely so she could help her father and there were two other siblings at home. She left to help her father run the greengrocery. He had been a jeweller. He came for the gold

rush and, I think I told you earlier on, he was in Wiluna. He used to have his office in Geraldton. I can't remember. They eventually came to live in Perth.

I know Annie went to primary school in Geraldton. I don't know if she went to secondary school here. Anyway, she helped her father. They would have come probably at the outbreak of the war. She was born in 1902 so it would have been during the war. They would have come and established something in St Georges Terrace.

She was visited by one of the lawyers there from Stone James. I think it was called Stone James Mason. It was Mr James who would see her reading books under the desk. He encouraged her with her literature. They used to exchange views and would talk a lot. He actually was knighted later. He had a big influence on her.

She was also quite musical and was able to have music lessons. I don't know how they would have paid for them but she did have music lessons. She actually became a certified music teacher. I don't know whether she actually taught music but she played piano until quite late in her life, until she was unable to do so.

She was highly intellectual in music and in literature: totally self-taught and had a brilliant mind. She was very well supported by her husband who was away in the war for a very long time. She managed to scrimp and save and knew how to bring up her family in comfort. Her biological mother, Minna Levi, died young and her father Woolf married again to Rosa, also Jewish, who was a good stepmother.

Q: Where did they live?

SG: They lived in 145 Chelmsford Road. That belonged to her father, so she inherited that property after he died. He died after John was born in 1935, so he met his grandson but he died before Mignonne was born in 1939.

Q: What did David do?

SG: He was brought up in Pinczow in Poland. It was nearer to Krakow rather than Warsaw. It was on the Nida River which is a tributary of the Vistula River. There were 20,000 people there. 10,000 were Jews and 10,000 were non-Jews and they got on famously together.

His father was on the Zionist Committee and was head of the committee. He was also a member of the City's board. He was on the town council. We have photographs of him on the town council.

His father was elderly so I think it was a second marriage for him. His first wife died. He had a half sister and a full sister. His father probably saw the writing on the wall and said to him when he turned 16, which would have been in 1923, that he should he come to Australia to be with his uncle. It wasn't exactly an uncle but his father's cousin. He came over to help his father's cousin, so he had a job to come to.

He left at the age of 16. He found his way to London – G-d knows how – where he caught a Greek boat, the Demasthenese, and he arrived in Albany as a third class passenger. He got off at Albany and found his way – G-d knows how – to Perth as a 16 year old, without any English whatsoever, to his uncle's house. He married his second cousin some time later.

Q: He married in 1934 because I wrote that down from the information you gave me. He was 27 at the time and she was 32.

SG: Yes, that's right. She then had two children. They had this heavy burden of looking after the two disabled siblings. I don't think the community was very helpful at that stage but Howard Solomon was very helpful to them. Howard Solomon was very friendly with her when they were growing up together. He told us that she was a very beautiful woman and he told us nice things.

They were definitely members of the Liberal Shule when it came into being but they were basically secular.

Q: Would they have had a Friday night?

SG: No, I don't think so. They might have when they were first married. I do remember as a 15 year old going to their house collecting for the Blue Box and I remember Mrs Wineberg giving me 10 shillings, which in those days was amazing. They weren't particularly Zionist but it is amazing.

I do remember because next door – and I won't mention who it was – there was another Jewish family and I was hounded out of the house – “Get out”. I remember that Mrs Wineberg was so kind that I thought she must have known I was going to be her son-in-law one day! She said, “Hang on” and went in and gave me 10 shillings.

This lady, who counted every cent from her pay package – every cent and we still have those records – gave 10 shillings at a time when most people were giving a silver coin. I remember the Fruchters, who couldn't afford anything either, who lived in Raglan Road, gave me 10 shillings also.

Q: Did your in-laws and your parents have much to do with each other?

SG: A little bit, yes. We went to their house and they came to our house. On Fridays particularly, after my father died, we used to always try and have them and my mother when it was at my place. My sister, Sophie, used to have Friday nights at her house. I can't remember how often it was at Sophie's place or at my place. My younger sister, Rita, was here as well but my brother, Jack, was in Adelaide and my sister, Rachel, was in Canada.

Q: Did Jack not come here?

SG: He came here for the last 5 years of his life. I had three associations with him: once during my childhood, when I looked up to him because he was 6 years older and he knew everything and I knew nothing; then when we were both in Adelaide together for a time, when he was married and before he divorced; then when he came to Perth to live in the village before going to the Maurice Zeffert Home.

It was over a period of 5 years and I had a lot to do with him then. We exchanged a lot of our memories. Some of the stuff I have told you is sourced from him. I told him more than he told me. He told me lots that I didn't know.

Q: Where are his children?

SG: His children, Ingrid and Frances, were brought up as Jewish as possible because his wife was thrown out of the picture. In those days you couldn't divorce. You had to have either 5 years of separation before you could get divorced (and I think it was 3 years if you were deserted) but within a year you could get a decree nisi after a divorce and the decree absolute would come after a year.

She became pregnant from another source so he had no difficulty in getting a decree nisi. He had the children because she didn't want them. He wanted them.

Q: Did he bring them up Jewish?

SG: Yes, he brought them up Jewish but they were brought up in a non-Jewish family. He used to take them to the synagogue every week. The non-Jewish family were Bahai so they respected Judaism. The children were told they were Jewish by the Bahai family who taught them that every religion was wonderful. They felt very strongly. They were brought up very largely by the daughter who was 15 years old.

Q: Your brother couldn't cope?

SG: My brother couldn't cope. He just had them on the weekends. He would have them but take them back to Gawler in South Australia, which was 20 miles away, where they were brought up. They attended the local school. My brother went every weekend. I visited

them at Gawler a couple of times. They both had their batmitzvahs here in Perth. The younger one married a Jew and divorced but they are still friends. They went to Israel and lived in the bottom part of Israel.

Q: The Negev or Sinai?

SG: No, they lived with the Arabs because they were very pro-Palestinian. They were Jewish but were anti-Israel but lived in Israel for a long time. They then came back to Australia. They communicated well with Jack but the younger one fell out with him. She got divorced from him, as I said, but she has a Jewish partner who is also pro-Palestinian. They live in a collective situation and have their own farming area near the north of New South Wales in the Lismore area.

The other one was converting to orthodoxy in Israel but after 2 years they said she still needed more time so she decided it was easier for her to convert liberal. She was Jewish by liberal standards so she decided to stay that way. She had a boyfriend who she was going to marry but he couldn't marry her until she became Jewish because it was a religious kibbutz. That was kept on hold. Then she decided she would prefer a female anyway. She brought up her daughter Jewish. Her daughter married a non-Jew but they are bringing up their son as a Jew, so my brother's granddaughter and great grandson are Jewish.

Q: Isn't it funny the way it works?

SG: It's a complicated thing, isn't it?

Q: Sonny, we might stop there because we have covered so many things. I want to thank you so much for giving me this time.

Q: Today is 12 May 2025 and I am with Sonny Gubbay to do our third interview. You have been such a wealth of information; it is just wonderful. One of the things I did not address was the fact that Sonny received the Order of Australia in 2006. Is that correct?

SG: Yes.

Q: I felt we should actually speak about this a bit. Sonny, can you tell us a bit about the honour which was bestowed upon you?

SG: It was given to me essentially because of my neurological activity. I didn't realise until the day I received it that I had so many people who were asked to be referees. Amongst them were the president of the Perth Hebrew Congregation, who never told me, and I think Rabbi Freilich was also asked as was Max Walters.

There were also other people who were asked who told me about it. One person in particular was Dr Manera in Bunbury, who was the Mayor of Bunbury and also a general practitioner. He came to see me as a patient. He said, "Oh, by the way, I was one of people who agreed you should receive the Order of Australia" because he had a superior order. In fact I helped him and sent him for an operation to relieve pressure on his spinal cord, which he didn't even suspect himself. Apparently they must ask about 10 people. It was mainly according to - - -

Q: Does somebody nominate you?

SG: Yes.

Q: Is that one person who nominates you?

SG: Yes.

Q: Do they then go and speak to your referees to find out more about you?

- SG: What happened in my case was that there were two simultaneous nominations, separate and unknown to each other. One of them actually spoke to me and said, "I am going to nominate you." I said, "Forget it." I said, "My wife wouldn't approve." That was what I had received it for, thought it was for. (Showing certificates).
- Q: I went on the internet and there was an article written in Servio News, which is the official publication produced by Royal Perth Hospital. That actually gave a really good description of why you were selected to be a recipient of the Order of Australia. You said two different people actually nominated you.
- SG: One of them was a doctor whose wife I had treated and then I treated him. He used to send me lots of cases and he thought I was a good fellow. The other one I won't disclose but he was a colleague. The combination of two different sources was pretty good. I think my advantage was that I wasn't born in Australia, that I was Jewish (which would have been an advantage in those days; not necessarily now). It's ethnically different. They tried to be as broad as they could because, quite frankly, everybody else around me had wonderful gifts and had done wonderful jobs but somehow someone appeals to them. That's what happens.
- Q: You are very richly deserving of the Order. How did receiving the Order affect you?
- SG: I was thrilled actually. Mignonne said, "Yeah, I know you really want it." I said, "No, I don't." "No, no" she said, "you should accept it." When I went back to the person who was going to nominate me I said, "No, my wife still doesn't want it and therefore I don't want to embarrass her." In the end she said, "You will probably like it, wouldn't you?" and in fact she is just as thrilled. Don't worry, she got a thrill out of it; meeting the Governor and that sort of thing. It was just a lovely occasion.
- Q: It was an acknowledgement.
- SG: It was certainly never anything I thought about. I would like to have gone as far as I could academically but certainly it didn't even enter my mind. When people decided that was what they wanted to do, I was very surprised. I felt as though I had received some sort of recognition which only usually comes after you die.
- Q: It is much more valuable when it comes whilst you are alive and you can enjoy that. I think we will pause it there, Sonny.