

Western Australian Jewish Seniors
Oral History Project

Transcription of an interview with

Wilfred Leslie Hirschfield

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ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

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KNOW

YOUR

Temple David, 34 Clifton Crescent Mount Lawley, 27 June 2018.

Know Your Nation: So if we start off by saying your full name and your date of birth?

Wilfred Hirschfield: Okay, my name is Wilfred Leslie Hirschfield, born on December 26, 1943.

KYN: Cool and where were you born?

WH: In Johannesburg in South Africa.

KYN: Okay. Were you one of brothers and sisters?

WH: I was the youngest of three boys.

KYN: And what were their names?

WH: The eldest was Joseph and the middle one is Raymond.

KYN: Was there any or is there any significance behind the name choices?

WH: I don't know the significance of their names, but mine is on a great grandfather who came from England, I believe.

KYN: Wilfred?

WH: Hmm.

KYN: That's nice. So there's some English heritage in there? What else?

WH: Yes, well, they stemmed originally from Lithuania and Poland. And my great grandparents have no idea how they got to South Africa, but that must've gone via England, I imagine. But then my parents were born in South Africa, so my grandparents must have come to South Africa from—but how they actually got there, I have no idea, never been able to find out from my parents.

KYN: So your grandparents, you think they're from England?

WH: I think, they've must—Well, I don't know because Wilfred is such—my great grandparents must have come via England because my grandparents came to South Africa, but they didn't speak fluent English, so they weren't born there.

KYN: Okay. And is that both sides or just your father's side?

WH: My mother's side. I've never meet my father's parents or my grandparents of my father's side.

KYN: Were they in South Africa or somewhere else?

WH: They're deceased by the time I was born.

KYN: Do you know where they were from originally?

WH: No, I don't. I just know my mother's side of the family.

KYN: What was your mother's maiden name?

WH: Judes, J-U-D-E-S.

KYN: So did your mother or father ever talk about their childhood about them growing up?

WH: Not a great deal, not the growing up, but when they were courting and in the early 20s I'd say.

KYN: What did they say?

WH: Well, my mother lived in Johannesburg, but my father lived in a very small town called Prieska, which is in the middle of nowhere in South Africa. And he came to Johannesburg and met her and went back to Prieska because he had a little business there. They courted for about seven years before he came backwards and forwards, and they married, and then they moved from Johannesburg and Prieska to another small town called Upington, which was bigger than Prieska, but still small, and that's where I grew up until I was six.

KYN: So were either at the area in Johannesburg or Prieska, particularly Jewish areas?

WH: The Johannesburg area was very Jewish, yes. Prieska was a very small town with about half a dozen Jews in it, and Upington also was a small town, although they had a shul and a rabbi.

KYN: And what caused your parents to move to Upington?

WH: I think in those days, they could buy a business there, and make a living from it. Whereas, already in Johannesburg it was more difficult to get a business. It was general dealer's shop or store, which was very common in the small towns. They sold everything and he made a good living out of it.

KYN: Yeah. Did they ever say how they met?

WH: No, I don't know. These were the things that they didn't speak about really much, it's surprisingly enough.

KYN: Did they both speak English as a first language?

WH: Yes.

KYN: Were they Yiddish at home?

WH: Well, my grandparents spoke Yiddish, and they spoke very little English. In fact, when I was six, we went to live, my grandfather died, so my family left Upington to live with my grandmother. She couldn't speak English or very little, so she used to speak to me in Yiddish and I used to answer her back in English.

KYN: So you did understand quite Yiddish?

WH: Yeah, I understood because it's very similar to Afrikaans, which is the language spoken in South Africa. Yeah, so I didn't have a great deal of problem understanding her, but, as I say, I spoke English and she spoke Yiddish.

KYN: What stories did she use to tell you?

WH: No, she didn't tell me any stories.

KYN: So what's your earliest memory?

WH: Memories? Playing with my neighbor in Upington, was a young girl of my age, named Stella, that's probably the earliest memory. And then going to primary school, like as a preschool, which was one class with three years in it, grade one, grade two, and standard one, they called today. My best friend was a blind boy, and his father was a bone dealer, so he had a shed full of bones, which we used to have a wonderful time playing, bones from cattle.

KYN: Was there anything, any particular way that you would play with the boy who is blind that you know, any particular parts of your play that you had to? I'm not saying this question very well. How do you play with it?

WH: I was four or five years old, I don't remember quite honestly. I just remembered playing in these big sheet of bones, which we had to build castles and also it was wonderful seats.

KYN: Do you remember what your house was like?

WH: In Upington? Yeah, it was a three bedroom, a lounge and a very big kitchen, a typical country town house and it had a stove in it, which was a stove which used charcoal to burn, say, the fire burnt all day. And we had a very big yard with fruit trees in it.

KYN: Did you spend a lot of time eating the fruit from the fruit trees?

WH: I think I've spent more time climbing the trees than actually eating the fruit.

KYN: So the three of you, did you play together or not really?

WH: No, because my next brother is five years older than me [inaudible 7:48] sort of what, there was quite a big difference of the age. They were pretty close, it was only two years, was two, three years difference between them, but it was a five year difference between me. So they were much older than me always.

KYN: Did the family give you treatment as the baby?

WH: Oh yes, yes, I think I was a spoiled baby.

KYN: In what way?

WH: Just for doing the wrong.

KYN: Do you think that's impacted your life?

WH: Well, I don't know, probably, it did because I wasn't terribly good at school and I think if I've been pushed a bit, I would have been better, but otherwise, no I didn't.

KYN: So what was being Jewish in your house like?

WH: Well, they were strictly kosher, and we used to go to shul every Friday night, and every Saturday. How I was brought up, it was just normal for me as being kosher and that.

KYN: And how did other people who weren't Jewish in Upington receive you guys? I know you were very young, so maybe you don't really know it?

WH: I really don't know, but I think they're quite well respected. I didn't have any problems.

KYN: Were there any traditions particular to your family that you remember from Friday nights or festivals or anything?

WH: Well, we always had Passover or Pesach in one of my uncle's house. It was just always there and the New Year's celebrations was always at my mother's house. She came from a family of five brothers and two sisters. So they were very close and they always came over to our house usually after work for a cup of tea or a drink, that's quite a regular thing.

KYN: Was there someone in the family duty to go like go to the Shochet or whatever or?

WH: When in Upington, we had the black African servant called the boy, and I used to go and take the chickens because we had the chicken ran and used that chickens on Friday to be slaughtered at the rabbi's place. Quite a traumatic experience.

KYN: Why?

WH: Well, they sliced the head and the chicken flipped around them, all over the place for a few minutes. As a four or five year old, it was quite well—

KYN: And did the boy look after you or did—?

WH: Yes, yes, he was like my nanny, I suppose.

KYN: So did you build a relationship with him?

WH: Yes, we were very close to the extent my mother told him—there was a river in Upington, which was strictly not allowed to go to because it was dangerous for kids to get to river. And of course, we were all went there, he threw little pebbles to us to keep us [away]or he would call our parents and get us into trouble because weren't obeying the rules.

He made sure we were punished for doing the wrong. I didn't know why he was looking after us.

KYN: And did he use to teach you anything about his customs?

WH: No.

KYN: Did you use to try and teach him about your customs?

WH: Not at that stage, no, I was too young.

KYN: Yeah. So what was your favorite festival as a child?

WH: Probably Pesach.

KYN: Why is that?

WH: Well, all the different foods, I love *matzah* and it's just different.

KYN: Did your mum make her own?

WH: No, she didn't make her own *matzah*, but she made all the other sweet dishes and any available times in the year.

KYN: And what would you have done when Pesach was finished, like what was the first thing that you did?

WH: Bread.

KYN: Did you have really late Seders that they go on and on?

WH: Yeah, until midnight quite often.

KYN: Was it like a pleasure to stay up or were you desperate to go to bed?

WH: No, it was great, it was great one because a lot of my cousins as well as my age mucked around and played.

KYN: And what happened when you found the *afikoman*?

WH: Everybody was used to get a prize. It didn't matter who find it. We all got little sweets, which was a good system.

KYN: Yeah. Did your mum find preparing for Friday nights and festivals stressful?

WH: No, I don't think so. I mean, there were servants in the house, two maids and then the boy, the main servants. I mean, they did all the work, so she just supervised mostly, helped a bit in the kitchen with the final preparations. But most of the cooking and the cleaning and preparation for whatever was done by them.

KYN: Did they know how to cook all the Yiddish food then?

WH: No, but my mother used to tell them how to do it. And one of the maids we had for a long time, for about 18 years, I think from memory and she knew everything.

KYN: So tell me about you as a student? You said that you probably needed to be pushed more.

WH: Well, yeah, I wasn't a great student. I got through high school, but it's just, you know, the old saying, I've got a PHD (post high school with difficulty). I was going to do law, but I just couldn't get my Afrikaans, I didn't like the language very much and I've found it very difficult, so I gave it up and just went into retail.

KYN: So what primary school and secondary school did you go to?

WH: Well, the primary school is one called Yeoville Boys, which was majority —it was a public school, but it was, I'd say two thirds Jewish because of the area that we were in. It was quite a nice school. And then high school, I went to one called King Edwards for the first three years, and then I went to a private college called Damelin College for the final two years.

KYN: Why did you move to that college?

WH: To try to get better grades.

KYN: Did it work?

WH: It did, but I still couldn't get through Afrikaans. I had a mental block with that.

KYN: Were the schools taught in English or in Afrikaans?

WH: English, but it was a dual language country, so you had to pass both languages, and if you wanted to go to university, you had to have a certain standard of the Afrikaans.

KYN: Were there people in your school who had Afrikaans as their first language?

WH: Yes.

KYN: And how did they go?

WH: Well, they used English as a second language. Yeah, I mean, they spoke English, and because everybody else spoke English, it wasn't difficult for them.

KYN: Did you ever come up against any anti-Semitism in the school?

WH: No, never.

KYN: Did you ever get up to mischief at school?

WH: No, not really. I used to carry a little water pistol in a shoulder holster, which I borrowed from my brother because they'll have guns in those days. And then because it's a little shoulder holster, they used to call me Inspector West, which was a radio program. They had Inspector West as a detective, but no, I didn't get up to mischief. I was a good little boy.

KYN: Did you use to shoot people with this water pistol?

WH: Any fellow students.

KYN: What caused you to start doing that?

WH: It was fun, I don't know, I just had a water pistol. It was just a good thing to add.

KYN: Okay. So you're six when you left Upington to go to Johannesburg, how did you feel when you left?

WH: It was okay, I didn't have a problem leaving.

KYN: And you moved in with your grandma?

WH: Hmm.

KYN: And what was her house like?

WH: It was a big house, four bedrooms, so each had a bedroom, and my parents had a bedroom. While I was young, I shared with my middle brother because my grandmother was still alive at that stage. She had one room, but she passed away about two years after we arrived, so then we all had our own rooms. We had a very bug lounge, very big formal dining room, [normal] kitchen and brick kitchen. It was a big house.

KYN: So they've been quite well to do?

WH: Yeah, I think they were reasonably comfortable, but I didn't know what they did for a living.

KYN: What was life like when you were living with your grandmother before she passed away?

WH: Well, it wasn't much different than normal. She sort of kept to herself because she didn't speak English. She didn't mix very much with the three boys. Because my mother used to speak to her and she spoke Yiddish. Basically, she kept to herself. She wasn't that well either.

KYN: How did it work with any maid or boy that your grandmother and grandfather had had and you're bringing the family boy over with you?

WH: No, we didn't. He stayed in Upington. He didn't come with us. They had two little, I supposed you can call them, granny flats at the back of the house where the servants stayed, that's where they lived. I think it was new ones.

KYN: Were they the ones that were already there?

WH: Yeah.

KYN: Yeah, okay. And did that change anything for you or it actually didn't—?

WH: No, I just accepted it. It was just a way we were brought up. Particularly, when I was very young, they were almost invisible around us. As you get older that you realize that they all other human beings and not just servants.

KYN: Have you got any memories of the war, like obviously, you were really young?

WH: No, none at all. I don't think it affected us when we were in Upington there was nothing. It was a small town.

KYN: Yeah. And did you hear any talk or did your parents ever talk about the war or the Holocaust or anything like that?

WH: No.

KYN: What was your earliest memory of being in Johannesburg?

WH: Probably going to primary school. How big everything was because you know, in Upington, the first year of school, as I said, three years in one class, and suddenly, we had this whole class sort of one size for everybody. I don't think it made much of a difference because I was too young and you just accept things at that age.

KYN: Yeah. And did the kind of things that you did when you went to school change when you were in Johannesburg?

WH: Yes. Well, it was much more things to do. There was music and choirs and games and soccer which we never had in a small school in Upington.

KYN: Which activities were you particularly keen on?

WH: I liked the singing classes and soccer.

KYN: Were there lots of like Jewish social activities?

WH: At school?

KYN: Well, I mean, once you were in Johannesburg?

WH: They were I'm sure, but I didn't participate in them.

KYN: Did you guys join the shul when you were in Johannesburg?

WH: Yes. We went to shul which was just two blocks away from us. It was very close.

KYN: Did you walk to shul?

WH: Yeah.

KYN: Yeah. So did you have a bar mitzvah?

WH: Yes.

KYN: What was it like?

WH: It was very nice except that I had mumps on my bar mitzvahs. A bit of a story because my elder brother had his appendix out on the day of his bar mitzvah. He woke up in the morning. He said to mother he got a sore stomach, and she said, well, it's just a nerves. And he said to father who gave him some brandy, he got the nerves. So he went to shul and had his bar mitzvah. We had the party reception at our house, and then my uncle who was a doctor who examined him, took him to the hospital to have his appendix out. I woke up in the morning of my bar mitzvah, my throat was killing me. It was really sore. My mother said it just nerves, gave him some brandy, which I didn't have because I like the smell of it. But I went to shul and my throat had got bigger and bigger, and I couldn't go to my reception either because I was invaded with mumps. I knew it.

KYN: How did you know it was very nice?

WH: Well, I'm told, it was very nice because I didn't have to make a speech, I didn't have to, I was sick and I've got all the presents.

KYN: Did you have to go to Hebrew classes before your bar mitzvah?

WH: Yes, yes, we used to go every afternoon. I went, as soon as, I started primary school I went to [Haida 23:01] every afternoon for an hour.

KYN: And did you start hanging out with the people in your Haida class?

WH: Yeah, well, they all lived around my areas. Yeah, we became friends for a long time.

KYN: And what key values did your parents encourage the three of you to follow when you were growing up?

WH: I suppose one of the most important one was honesty and I think just honesty and loyalty to one another and to other people.

KYN: Were they quite keen on you staying as Jewish as possible and married somebody who's Jewish?

WH: Yes.

KYN: What did they use to say about that?

WH: They didn't say that much. It was just assumed that I'd married a Jewish girl and it was sort of drilled to me all the time.

KYN: Yeah. What happened after your bar mitzvah, did you continue going to shul all the time?

WH: I used to go at least on Friday night, every night and usually on the Saturday, but not always, but I didn't go to Haida anymore I gave it up.

KYN: Yeah. As a teenager were there any clubs or anything like Zionist movements or youth movements or anything for you to join?

WH: Well, yes, there was Bnei Akiva and Habonim. I belonged to Habonim and scheduled a camps, but I wasn't a regular attendee on it.

KYN: What did you think of it?

WH: I just loved the camps, but I didn't like the weekly meetings.

KYN: What used to happen in the weekly meetings?

WH: Well, I've just found them boring quite honestly. We used to have the Madrichim telling us about what to do and how to get badges. It didn't appeal to me.

KYN: What kind of badges were on offer?

WH: I don't know. Just knot tying and things I just didn't take any interest in. So I didn't go to many of the weekly meetings. I loved the camps because it was an organized holiday.

KYN: Okay. So you finished school, you got your PhD, you decided to go to retail, you go to Habonim camps, but not really to the weekly meetings?

WH: Yes.

KYN: What happened next?

WH: Well, I finished school and I started working and—

KYN: Where did you work?

WH: There's a place called Dion's, which was the equivalent in Australia would be Harvey Norman, sold electrical wholesaler and furniture shops, and I used to sell furniture. And then I went to another place called Mattress House, by the name, I sold mattresses and furn. What I used to do? I got this friend, he had a boat and we used to go waterskiing on the weekends. We did it for years and years and years.

KYN: Was that in Johannesburg or outside?

WH: It's outside Johannesburg. Johannesburg is inland. It has got no water. So there was a suburb or town called Germiston, which is about half an hour drive out of Johannesburg. It had a lake which was—because it was used to mine. It used a lot of water and the water were going to the lake. It wasn't very good water. It was full of cyanide because it was a goldmine, but we still water skiing in it, but you couldn't swim in it, but you can waterskiing in it.

KYN: What happened if you fell in?

WH: I just fell in myself. It wasn't a very good for your skin. I've had problems with psoriasis for many years afterwards, and I'm sure that was the cause of it.

KYN: Did you ever get paranoid that you would drink some of it?

WH: No, I mean, it's full of cyanide, but in diluted form. Birds used to drink the water and they didn't die. It wasn't that bad.

KYN: So what did anything interesting or funny or anecdotal ever happened during your time at the mattress thing?

WH: At the Mattress House?

KYN: Mattress House or you know, previous—?

WH: Well, nothing extraordinary funny, I don't recall, I was just going to work and nothing in particular that comes into mind.

KYN: Did you consider yourself ambitious?

WH: Yeah, fairly ambitious?

KYN: So did you move quickly through the ranks?

WH: Hmm. You reaches, because we're used to work on commission, the more you sell, the more money you earn, as soon as you became a manager you no longer on commissions. So it's better to be a salesperson than to be a manager.

KYN: So how did you deal with that?

WH: Well, they asked if I wanted to be a manager, I said, no because you learned very quickly that you were earning more than the managers were earnings. It's a strange situation, but that's how it was.

KYN: So you ended up meeting a nice person to settle down with?

WH: Judith. She's Perth born, but traveled the world quite extensively and came to Johannesburg. She met a girlfriend in Europe somewhere and she said, come to South Africa and you can stay with me. So she went and she got a working permit and she was there for six years. I wasn't very great waterskiing. I didn't do much sports except I played tennis very occasionally. And this friend said to me they need a fourth for tennis, and I reluctantly went to it and met Judith on the tennis court.

KYN: And did you fall in love with her immediately?

WH: Well, not falling in love but I liked her immediately. I suppose being an Australian was a mystique in South Africa. Yeah, I went out with her for quite a while and then fell in love, and we decided to settle there. She was always keen to come to Perth. So I came for a look and see in 1975 and it was in February. It was the hottest February they'd had for about 20 years or something. It was stinking hot and I went to Cottesloe. I got dumped and I tore the ligaments in my ankle, so I was hobbling on the walking sticks and my mother-in-law had an air conditioner in one room. It was hot all the time. I said, I never going back to this place again. It just so horrible. But then they had this [inaudible 30:42] in '76 and suddenly it didn't seem such a terrible place anymore. I came back here in '77 and I've been happy ever since.

KYN: So did you get married here or not?

WH: We got married in Johannesburg.

KYN: Tell me about the proposal?

WH: No, I tell you about the wedding. My mother-in-law, two brother-in-law and a sister-in-law came to the wedding in Johannesburg. We had the pre-reception after the Saturday service at our house [inaudible 31:42] because they weren't allowed to smoke in the house, they went out for a walk to smoke and they got lost, they couldn't find the house again. My brother-in-law who was making a speech and where's my wife? And eventually, they went to the next door neighbor's house and they asked if they knew who we were because they couldn't remember the house and they found it. But after the wedding, I took my mother-in-law and sister-in-law and one brother-in-law along with us on the honeymoon, which was bit unusual as well, because we went to the Game Reserves and they've never been to South Africa, so we all went together. But it was very pleasant and we had a good time.

KYN: And did your parents and her parents get on well?

WH: Yeah, very well. It was just the mother actually. They were similar in, I suppose behavior, they like cooking—

KYN: And there was no kind of differentiation between level of religiousness or level of Yiddishkeit or anything like that?

WH: Well, my parents were more religious. It was okay. More observant, not religious.

KYN: So you guys settled in Johannesburg?

WH: We settled there. We lived there for two [Storyteller edit: three] years.

KYN: Did you start a family there?

WH: Yes. I had a son.

KYN: What's his name?

WH: Adam. He was three in South Africa.

KYN: What, if anything was significance behind the name?

WH: Judith liked the name. It was her choice.

KYN: Did he have a Hebrew name?

WH: Sefania which is named after Judith's father.

KYN: How was he on the long travel here?

WH: Oh, he loved it. It was fun, even though, he was very small. Yeah, no problem at all. He didn't cry on the plane or anything.

KYN: Did you get in any way caught up in the riots before you left?

WH: No, not this [way].

KYN: Where were you when they're happening?

WH: We were in the suburb of Johannesburg called Sandringham that's where we had an apartment there. It was a nice suburb, very Jewish area. It was all very far away from the riot, but you could see it in the papers what was happening and around the TV news what it's like.

KYN: Yeah. So just for the tape, do you want to just give a brief description of like what, why there?

WH: What happened was that some of the black Africans were protesting about their lack of freedom and the police opened fire on a group who were walking or protesting in the street, and quite a few were killed,

and then they had riots because of that. The riots were all in the African township of Soweto. Pretty violent and a lot of people were injured and killed. Unfortunately, most of the blacks were killed more than the whites were, and so that's sort of what I thought was the beginning of the end of apartheid. And I sort of started to get it out of South Africa because it's going to get more and more violent and I did.

KYN: Was Johannesburg a violent place before then?

WH: No, not in the areas where we lived. There was occasionally an incident, but like any big cities, there's always incidents, but there was nothing organized rioting or anything like that. No, it was fine, as far as the whites in the area that concerned, it was all kept away from us. I could see it was going to change.

KYN: So where did you go when you first moved here?

WH: We rented a house in Menora and I wanted to buy it, and he wanted \$45,000 for it, and I thought \$45,000 was an absolute ripped off, if any not known. So we bought a smaller house in Dianella, which wasn't nearly as nice, and I paid \$32,000, but I suppose it's all in relation to the income that we had at the time. And then we moved into a nicer house also in Dianella near the Channel Nine TV station. And then finally, we moved into Yokine.

KYN: How were you received by people in Perth?

WH: Very warmly.

KYN: Was the Jewish community welcoming?

WH: Extremely welcoming because we were one of the first arrivals from South Africa. So at that stage, we were still a novelty, you know. It was only, I think three other couples, yeah, from South Africa. And then we came and then after that, in the early 80s, they came in mass, lots of people came.

KYN: So did you join a shul when you first got here?

WH: Yes.

KYN: Which one?

WH: PHC.

KYN: Did you stay there or did you move?

WH: No, we stayed there.

KYN: Yeah. So in what way, if told as the Jewish community here different than South Africa, Johannesburg?

WH: Well, they're much more...what's the word? Particularly, when we first came, everybody else knew everybody. You know, you weren't a stranger because everybody knew everybody else. Now, it's become a bigger city again. And I certainly don't know every Jewish family in Perth, but it was a very nice place and it was easy to make social friends.

KYN: And where, if there was any where did Jewish people go to hang out together in like the 70s, early 80s?

WH: In Perth?

KYN: Yeah.

WH: At the Jewish center. It was the main thing. That's where most of the functions were and we entertained a lot of homes as well and we're entertained, often we served meals with friends who come to us.

KYN: Did the shul hold social events?

WH: No, not at that time. The WIZO group used to—Judith's mother was Lily Adonis and she was one of the cooks in the WIZO kitchen, and they used to have a lot of events for WIZO fundraising which used to be a very nice.

KYN: Yeah, okay. So what did you do for work when you got here?

WH: Initially, I worked for Harry Atlas, yeah, the furniture store. And then I went to Parrys I was with Harry for about a year. And then I went to Parrys they were taken out by Vox Adeon, so I became a manager of the [big box] store.

KYN: So why did you become a manager?

WH: Well, it was a different system to Johannesburg. If you're a manager you got money and you got car as well, so it was quite an incentive. And then after that I joined Myer's and I stayed for 25 years, selling furniture.

KYN: Yeah. How, if you told that the Jewish traditions of your family changed once you got here?

WH: Say it again?

KYN: How, if you told that the Jewish traditions change once you got here?

WH: Not a great deal. We still keep kosher and still do the kosher, although the in-laws didn't keep kosher, so that was a bit of a problem. Then we had the Pesach, for instance, we'll come to our house to do the cooking. So I couldn't bring anything to the house which wasn't kosher, but besides that the family is really close together.

KYN: Yeah. Did you have more children?

WH: No, only one.

KYN: Which was Adam, yeah. So did Adam build a very strong relationship with his grandparents here?

WH: Yes, with his grandmother. His grandfather wasn't, he passed away.

KYN: Okay. And how often did you see your parents and your family?

WH: They came a year after we were here. And again, I think it was about five years afterwards. I went back twice.

KYN: How did you deal with the emotional side of it?

WH: Well, it was okay until—my father got ill, he had cancer, so I went back to see him. So it was emotional and sad because I knew that once I left I wouldn't see him again. My mother, she was okay and she died suddenly. It wasn't such an emotional drain that I went to see her while she was sick or anything.

KYN: Yeah. Was there ever any talk of them leaving South Africa?

WH: No, they didn't want to come. They were too settled anyway there.

KYN: Yeah. What about your brothers?

WH: Well, my elder brother, he developed melanoma and passed away from that. My middle brother, he's got a daughter and the daughter married a boy from this town in South Africa and they came with my brother and his wife to Perth and they loved it, and they're going to settle here. And they actually made an application to come, but then his son-in-law, he developed cancer and died. So my niece wouldn't leave there and so her parents didn't come or my brother didn't come. And then they decided later, maybe they should come, but the rate of exchange had dropped so much, they couldn't afford to.

KYN: Wow, cancer.

WH: Yeah, scary.

KYN: Yeah.

WH: He was only very young as well in his mid-30s.

KYN: So raising a Jewish boy in Perth in the 80s, talk me through that?

WH: It wasn't difficult. He went to Carmel School. He used to go to Bnei Akiva as a [central] group. He had a lot of friends there. I was fun. There was no problem at all, with, you know, non-Jewish people or anti-

Semitism should I say. It was fine. It was very easy to and he had nice friends. It was easy.

KYN: Did you think there was a sense of, because the Jewish community in Perth is so small, and Perth isn't the most multicultural place? Did you feel that there is a risk that he would end up not leading a particularly Jewish life when he was older?

WH: Well, when he was a teenager, he became very firm, ultra firm in fact, and so we thought it's never going to be a problem there. But then he went to *Yeshiva* in Israel and he hated it. And he left *Yeshiva* and spent a year mucking about in Israel, and came back totally unobservant. He doesn't go to shul or anything, but he still observes the Yom Tovim. And he hasn't married, which is a bit of a worry. He's 42. Trying to getting married off now, it's getting a bit late in life to do it.

KYN: So what are the key values that you tried to instill in Adam when he was growing up?

WH: Well, we encouraged to follow the religion, just nothing special. He wasn't a problem child or anything like that. He was fun. He was a good boy. He wasn't wild or anything like that.

KYN: As a father, what's your proudest moment be?

WH: Proudest regarding my son? I suppose his bar mitzvah. It was a big event for us. He finished school. He did a course in medical laboratory science, which was a five-year university course which he finished, but he couldn't get a job in that field. So he did a course in computers and has been in computers ever since and he moved to Sydney now.

KYN: Nice. So is there any other topic that you think we should be covering that we haven't covered?

WH: No, I think you've covered it all.

KYN: Are there any other stories that really need to get on the tape that haven't gotten to the tape yet?

WH: Not that I can think of.

KYN: So what is the message for people who are listening to this in 15 years' time? What's the takeaway?

WH: Well, you've got to follow your mind about where you want to live. It's more important to look after your family, and make sure that they are in a safe place.

KYN: Yeah, cool. Thank you.

WH: Thank you.

END INTERVIEW ONE.

Temple David, 34 Clifton Crescent Mount Lawley, 29 August 2018.

Know Your Nation: So if you say your name and your date of birth?

Wilfred Hirschfield: Wilfred Leslie Hirschfield, 26.12.1943.

KYN: Cool. So last time, we talked about growing up being in South Africa, coming over here, you touched very briefly on your career over here, and raising your boy.

WH: Yes, my son.

KYN: Tell me more?

WH: So, well, as I probably said last time, I started working for a company called Parry's, and then then it became, it changed names to Vox Adeon, and I was there for about 13 years roughly.

KYN: How do you spell that word, Vox Adeon?

WH: V-O-X, two words, A-D-E-O-N, which eventually became Harvey Norman's. They keep buying each other out, but I'd left before that stage. And then, I joined Myer department stores, and I was there for

25 years, working in the furniture department, and it was very nice. But what I really wanted to say was that coming to Australia sort of changed my life, gave me a purpose of doing something back for the community. And I joined Magen David Adom. I was there as a secretary for roughly 15 to 20 years. I can't remember the exact time, and since then I've become a president of it, and even more importantly, we started a group, when I retired with a friend of mine, where he gets the speaker each week, and I'll send out an email to all these people who've come to it, started off very small, about 16 people. And we now, regularly, getting every week, 50 people, and these are men who've retired, and having much to do with themselves or know what to do with themselves. And they come along on a Tuesday, and have a cup of coffee, and a sandwich, and a piece of cake. And it's just grown very well, and I just feel it's doing this to give something back to the community. As I say I make an email every week, which has a bit of men's health in it, a few jokes, a bit of did you know, and how to do this, and sort of various things, and that's become very popular—

KYN: And is this email for the people who attend the group?

WH: Yep.

KYN: You haven't said the name of the group?

WH: Oh, Living In Retirement. It's just not a formal group it's just what we call it, Living In Retirement, I feel it's given me something to do since I've retired, and it's good for them because they all come and initially, they were all very reticent and sat at the table, and spoke to the person next to them, maybe if it was a friend, but now, they're all wandering around, and saying, hello to their friends, and they've all become friends because we've been doing for three years now, and it's just working out well.

KYN: Do you think that you're kind of extra-curricular activities and stuff stepped up in Perth when it wasn't so high in South Africa?

WH: Yeah, well, in South Africa, I wasn't community minded, to be quite honest. It was just me and my friends. We didn't belong to any organisations and since, coming to Perth, maybe because it was a smaller community, and perhaps there are more things that are required to be done by a smaller amount of people, so I joined and got me hooked in.

KYN: That's fantastic.

WH: Yes.

KYN: So tell me about what kind of work you've done with Magen David Adom?

WH: Well, what it is, is we support Israel Magen David Adom financially, and through the years, we've purchased two ambulances, and four medi bikes, which is a motorbike, which has got a first aid kit on the back of

it, and it's used by the first aid stations to get to incidents quickly, so they can give first aid before the ambulances arrive, because particularly, in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the streets are narrow and very busy and the ambulances struggle to get to incidents or emergencies. And these motorbikes can weave in and out and get there very quickly, and they've been a fantastic success. We've had a few social events here, but basically, it's all fundraising, and - I've brought out a calendar, which is a Jewish Hebrew calendar for them, and we sell that as our main fundraising event each year.

KYN: And why did you choose Magen David Adom to get into?

WH: It was by accident. I was going to go to JNF, which is Jewish National Fund, but I went to a meeting, and the meeting that I went to was an executive meeting, and they said I wasn't allowed to come because I wasn't a committee member. So I was a bit annoyed about that, and so I went to Magen David Adom, who welcomed me.

KYN: And are you particularly Zionist is that why you wanted to an Israeli —?

WH: Yeah, I'm Zionist and I did spend six months in Israel in 1967 as a volunteer.

KYN: So what is the kind of mainstay of the work you do, like in literal terms, what's the mainstay of the work you do for Magen David Adom, you've explained what the endpoint is, which is fundraising so you can purchase motorbikes and everything, and the calendar, what does the secretary do and what does the president do?

WH: Well, the secretary is keeping records and writing letters and the whole thing was, it's always fundraising, so we always trying to think of ways to do fundraising. As I said, we do the diary and what's in the diary at, we have a membership drive and then the diary, and then we ask for donations for the diary, and during the year, we sell gift certificates and such like, which was small amounts, but they all add up to a reasonable amount by the end of the year.

KYN: Nice.

WH: Yes.

KYN: And then Living In Retirement, tell me about how that became-?

WH: Well, that started with four of us getting together and just chatting and saying "We really need to do something because all these guys are sitting at home with their wives" and I think when women retired, they know what to do because all their life, they'd been socialising with their friends. Men go to work each day, that's they socialising, and when they come out of work, when they retire, they don't have their friends. They won't have their friends around them anymore, and they don't know what to do themselves. So we decided that we would have a meeting, and we negotiated with the café to give us sandwiches, and

coffee at a reasonable price, which is \$5. We got a speaker. As I said, it started off very slow, but within six months, it started increasing, word got around, and we regularly have at least 50 people coming every Tuesday morning, spend, come in at 10:00, leave at 12:00 and they're all very happy about it.

KYN: Have you heard of the kind of ripple effect of positive impact that it has beyond - so obviously, people are really benefiting from being able to attend on Wednesday, but what's the ripple effect, what impact are you having?

WH: Well, the effect is that they now making friends with one another because they're meeting once a week, and they've got more friends in their immediate circle, which I can speak to and go out with and meet with, you know, they can play cards or whatever they do privately, but I've now got new friends that's the ripple effect of saying.

KYN: And what's the age range of people who attend?

WH: From 55 to 100, and we've got two members in the 100s.

KYN: And are you doing things to try and incorporate those really vulnerable people who, you know, might to be collected from their home and encouraged to come?

WH: Yeah, we do. There are a couple of people who are in wheelchairs and we've arranged with people who do come in that area to pick them up, and either wheel them over or pick them up in the car and come over and that's - we do that.

KYN: And what about people who are perhaps shy or don't really have friends, you know, like if someone just walked in and didn't know anyone, is there a welcoming committee?

WH: We don't have a welcoming committee, but we always put them at the table with sort of people on their own age and everybody is very friendly. They will all welcome everybody. As I said, initially, they were all keeping to their own little groups, but now, they all talk to one another, and even the young and the old they mixed together very well, surprisingly enough.

KYN: And what about, is it across all the shules?

WH: Yes.

KYN: Do you have any people who aren't Jewish who come?

WH: No, they're all Jewish. It's a Jewish group.

KYN: Fabulous.

WH: Yeah, it does – it's worked out very well. And that's basically what I wanted to tell you, what I've thought I'd left out from my previous talk. I think it was fairly important to tell you.

KYN: How long do you spend on the newsletter?

WH: At least five or six hours a week. There's a lot of research goes into it. Normally, it takes me a full day to get it, but if I'm lucky, I can find some interesting articles or jokes quickly, then it's about four or five hours.

KYN: Do you ever get positive feedback from the wives of those who attend?

WH: They like my newsletter. Yes, I do, and they do say that they're happy that the men are getting out of the house, quite a few have in fact said that to me.

KYN: That's brilliant. Have you got like a rolling committee or are you just going to stay—?

WH: At the moment, well, there's a committee of four - five, one sets up the tables in the morning and the chairs we're set it up. I do the emails and Colin Rockman finds the speakers. There's another one, but he's had ill health and he hasn't been able to get himself involved very much. We're not having another committee, but we're still thinking of other things to do, like we wanted to take them on a boat cruise on the river from Fremantle to Perth during the summertime.

KYN: And what else?

WH: Well, I just wanted to say that's getting involved in things in Australia has made my life very worthwhile, and Australia has been really good to me. It's, you know, I've got a house, a home, cars and I live well, which I probably wouldn't have had been able to do in South Africa, if I'd stay there. So I'm very grateful to that.

KYN: That's wonderful, that's really nice. Did you actually find the transition in lifestyle really tricky when you first came here? I don't mean in terms of hobbies, but in terms of—?

WH: No, language was a bit funny because although we spoke English there were different words were used for different things. For an instance, Friday night bread called challah, in South Africa, it's called the kitke. And when I came with my mother-in-law, my mother always sent me to the shop to get the kosher butcher to buy the challah, and of course, I forgot the word challah so I asked for a kitke, and they gave me a Kit Kat. So little things like that, but now, but life is very similar. It's the same type of people, and the same weather. It's very similar.

KYN: Good. I'm please you came back.

WH: Thank you.

KYN: Anything else?

WH: No. I think we're done now.

KYN: OK.

END OF INTERVIEW.