

WITS UNIVERSITY MEDICAL SCHOOL GRADUATING CLASS OF 1960



Newsletter #3 – Highlands North

Compiled by Gary Katz, London, August 2020

*Gary Katz writes: This Newsletter is about the **ten** matriculants of 1954 from **Highlands North High School, Johannesburg** who were accepted to Wits Medical school. This was an astonishingly high number, never matched at the school, before or since. It was clearly a special year.*

Six of these ten 1954 matriculants started at Medical School in 1955, graduating in the class of 1960 – the class that is celebrating its Diamond Jubilee. They are **Leonard (Len) Kahn, Gerald Lampert, Gerald Shulman, Gerald Schneider, Jack Kussel** and me (**Gary Katz**).

Also starting with us in 55, but graduating a year later, were two more: **Mervyn Damelin** and **John Festenstein**. (John having left Highlands North before matric).

Three others of our matriculants deferred their uptake of a place for a year or more before entering Medical School: **Ivan Samson** and **Peter Soldin** started their courses in 1956 and graduated in 1961 and **Brian Bethlehem**, graduated in Medicine in 1967. This makes a total of 11 Highlands North boys at Wits Medical School in those years.



The ten future medics are all in the photograph of 1954 Matric Class. They are:

Front row: (sitting on ground): Gerald Schneider 4th from Right.

2nd row from front (seated): Peter Soldin 1st on Left; Gerald Shulman 4th from Left; Jack Kussel 6th from Left (Centre Mr Kenneth W Wynn Headmaster) Gerald Lampert 7th from Right, next to Head; Brian Bethlehem 3rd from Right; Mervyn Damelin 1st on Right

3rd row from front: Len Kahn 5th from Right

4th row from front: Ivan Sampson in the middle

Back row: Gary Katz 2nd from Right

I have been asked whether we had inspiring schoolteachers, but I cannot recall any. We were simply ambitious and competitive boys keen to do well in the classroom and on the sports field. Apart from those who went into Medicine, there were other high-fliers in our matric year. One became a highly successful barrister and then judge in Johannesburg. Another became the senior partner of one of the largest accountancy firms in Canada. Several others did well at Wits in their chosen courses. We must have been a joy to teach – at least some of the time. (I recall a personal visit or two to the Headmaster’s office for six of the best for various pranks).

All these 11 Highlands North boys had memorable medical careers. For some they were the first of their extended families to attend a University. Three (Gerald Lampert, Gerald Schneider and Mervyn Damelin) became **General Practitioners**, three became **Paediatricians** (Gary Katz and Jack Kussel and Ivan Samson). three specialised in **Pathology** (Len Kahn, Gerald Shulman and Peter Soldin) one in **Radiology** (John Festenstein) and one in **Anaesthetics** (Brian Bethlehem). The three GPs have sadly all died.

Name & year of graduation	Speciality	City/Town	Died
Brian Bethlehem (67)	Anaesthetics	Johannesburg	
Mervyn Damelin (61)	GP	Mafeking	2012 age 75
John Festenstein (61)	Radiology	London	
Len Kahn (60)	Pathology	New York	
Gary Katz (60)	Paediatrics	London	
Jack Kussel (60)	Paediatrics	Johannesburg	
Gerald Lampert (60)	GP	Johannesburg	1998 age 61
Ivan Samson (61)	Paediatrics	St Catharines, Ontario	
Gerald Schneider (60)	GP	Germiston	2012 age 75
Gerald Shulman (60)	Pathology	Atlanta	
Peter Soldin (61)	Pathology	Vereeniging	

Of these eleven Highland North High School doctors, six practiced in South Africa, (**Kussel, Lampert, Schneider, Soldin, Damelin and Bethlehem**). Two went to the USA. After travelling and working in different centres, **Len Kahn** settled in New York and **Gerald Shulman** in Atlanta. **John Festenstein** and I, (**Gary Katz**) settled in London after working in America for a short while. **Ivan Samson** settled in St Catherines Ontario.

Eight of the eleven us are still alive, all in our early eighties, and though mostly retired, or furloughed, still lead busy lives, some consulting in their speciality and others indulging in cultural pursuits (or both). What seems to have characterised all of us is our love and care for our patients and our desire to further the knowledge and organisation of our specialities. This appears to have been appreciated by our patients and colleagues.

The Six Graduates of 1960

All the six young men who started Medicine in 1955 and went straight through, graduating in 1960, feature with biographical sketches and pictures on our dedicated 'Wits Class of 60' website, linked by their names from the 'Who's Who' page (as do the two who started with us in our class of 55 and finished a year later 1961). You can find them all here https://wits_medical_alumni_1960.mailchimpsites.com/whos-who--the-class-of-1960 (or click the link from their names, to their biographies at the end of their summaries below)

Jack Kussel, Paediatrician, Johannesburg



Jack has messages attesting to his warm personality and excellent care from his patients, great and small. He looked after the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Nelson Mandela. In his story on the website we see Mandela photographed with Jack's own children and

grandchildren. Madiba called him an 'outstanding medical expert' in the inscription to his gift to Jack of his biography 'Long Walk to Freedom'.

On his retirement a grateful and loving patient wrote a beautiful poem of how everyone will always remember Jack Kussel which ended thus:

Dr Kussel, your career may have come to a rest – but your legacy and the lives you saved (literally!) will live on with EVERYONE ... FOREVER.

We salute you

We thank you.

And we will never ever forget you.

You can read the whole poem and his full bio and see his pictures here [Kussel, Jack Josiah](#)

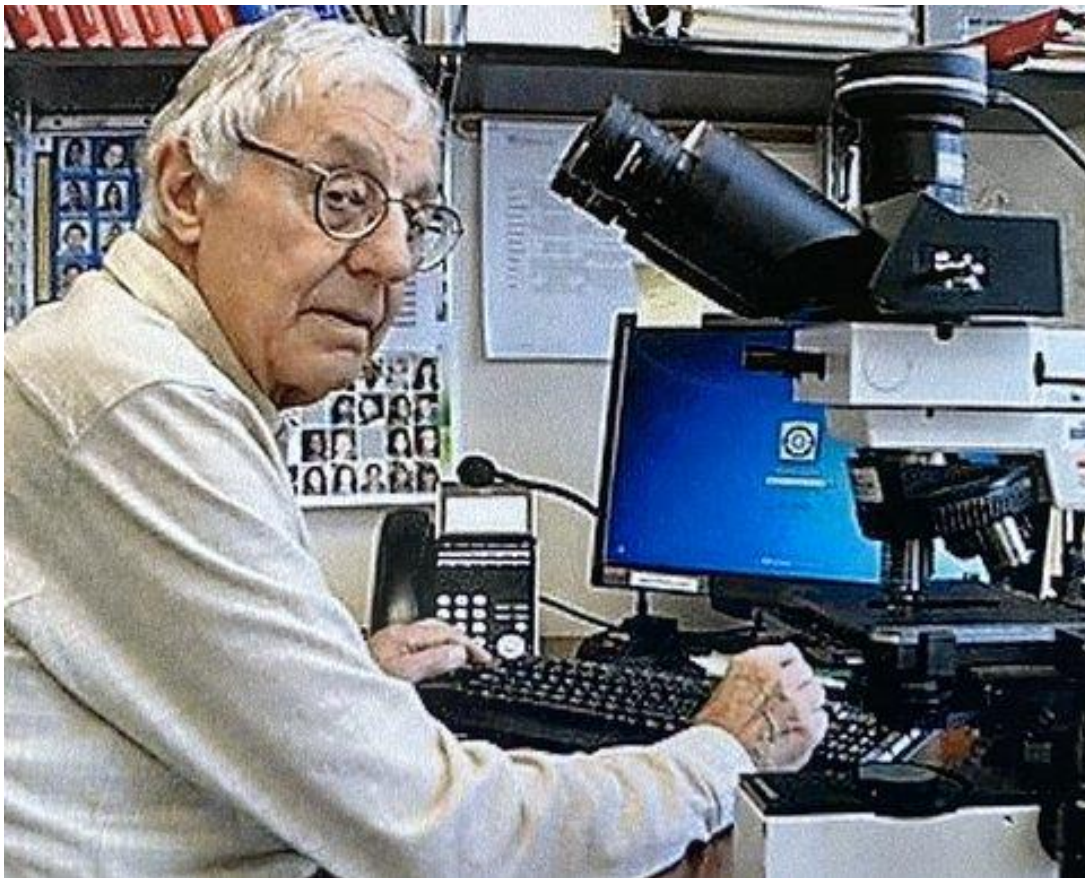
LONG WALK TO FREEDOM

To Dr Jack Kussel,
Compliments & best
wishes to an outstanding
medical expert.

Mandela
2. 12. 95

Leonard Kahn, Surgical Pathologist, New York

Len was a straight A student at Highlands North. He received several distinctions in the classroom and was an enthusiastic sportsman. Len was given a special prize for outstanding scholarship on leaving school. He received first class passes in all his first- and second-year medical subjects.



It was in his third year that Len really found his calling. He fell in love with microscopy and the study of microanatomy of human tissue in health and disease. In 1962 he moved to the University of Cape Town (UCT) to specialize in pathology and following a 3-year registrarship program was awarded the Degree of Master of Medicine in Pathology (MMed Path UCT). He then went to St Louis Missouri where he was privileged to work with the world-renowned American physician and pathologist **Lauren V Ackerman**, who championed the subspecialty of surgical pathology. There followed professorships in surgical pathology at UCT and then in North Carolina and finally New York, where Len is still a work. You can read his full biography and see some of his collection of South African Paintings here: [Kahn, Leonard Bernard](#)

Gerald Lampert, General Practitioner, Johannesburg

Gerald and I (**Gary Katz**) became friendly at school and great friends at Wits. He and I worked together in a 'firm' with **Len Kahn, Aubrey Milunsky, Farrell Sims** and **Dennis Rossouw**. In a moving essay on his father who died at the age of 61 in 1998, Gerald's son Dr Kevin Lampert, remembered that Gerald L was Head Boy at Highlands North. He also recounts the time when Gerald and I dissected a rat in my mother's laundry room – launching our anatomy career as well as my mother's fury. Kevin Lampert also mentions how Gerald worked at weekends to make ends meet in the bookies' offices at Turffontein. He and I also served as bar waiters at the Rand Easter Show. Gerald told Kevin that he and I worked together as male nurses at West Rand Mines Hospital, where we learned to suture and apply Plaster of Paris from a maestro plaster technician. Like several of us. Gerald failed his first home nursing exam, but unlike some of us, he became a meticulous bed-maker and passed this skill on to his children.

Gerald was a keen squash player. When a wrist injury curtailed his squash 'career' he took up running – in a big way! That included countless marathons and 13 Comrades Marathons in which he was awarded 7 silver finishes. He would leave his house, rain or shine, at 4:00 in the morning and run 16 to 20 miles before work. In his running lifetime he must have covered almost twice the circumference of our earth! You can read Kevin's loving tribute to Gerald here [Lampert, Gerald](#)



Gerald Schneider, General Practitioner, Germiston



The second Gerald in our class was Gerald Schneider. On graduation he set up as a General Practitioner in Germiston and remained there his whole career. He was much loved by his patients and by his family. Len Kahn, his colleague and classmate at school and at Wits, attested to Gerald's devoted attention to his mother, Rachel Kahn, who suffered from multiple sclerosis for many years; and to his father, Robert Kahn, who suffered from a salivary gland malignancy. Gerald also paid frequent visits, despite his extremely busy practice schedule, to Robert Kahn during Robert's final years as a resident at the retirement facility in Sandringham. Gerald died in 2012, aged 75. You can read Len Kahn's appreciation of Gerald here [Schneider, Gerald](#)

Gerald Shulman, Pathologist, Atlanta



Gerald Shulman, our third Gerald, was also hooked by microscopes early on. After his house jobs at Coronation Hospital, Gerald Shulman joined the staff of the South African Institute for Medical Research as a trainee pathologist. Gerald met and married Dr Cynthia Cohen in 1965. In 1968, he qualified as a Fellow of the South African Faculty of Pathologists. Cynthia followed the same path. They travelled together to London where Gerald worked at the **Postgraduate Medical School at Hammersmith Hospital, in Chemical Pathology**. At the same time, Cynthia furthered her career by attending the Clinical Pathology course at Hammersmith

Hospital, graduating with the Diploma in Clinical Pathology. At the end of two years Gerald graduated with the Membership of the Royal College of Pathologists. They succeeded in obtaining a series of 'his and hers' jobs together in **Johannesburg, Hershey Pennsylvania, Little Rock, Arkansas** and **Atlanta, Georgia** where Gerald became heavily involved with blood banks. Like Len and others of the many academics in the class of 60, Gerald has written many articles, papers and chapters in books on his subject. You can read his full biography here: [Shulman, Gerald](#)

Gary Katz, Paediatrician, London

I was introduced to paediatric surgery at the age of 8 when Josh Lannon took my appendix out. My student experiences at Baragwanath and the Transvaal Memorial Hospital (TMH) and a month on the Children's ward at Bara before my house jobs were a real inspiration and added to my ambition to pursue a career in Paediatrics. I served on the Student Medical Council in 1958 and 1959.

My wife Karen (Kirsch) and I married in June 1960. We worked for a year in America and moved to London in

1963. Life in London was good to us. As events fell into place we decided to settle there.

During my Senior Registrar rotation, I used my 'spare' time to complete the research for my MD, which I submitted in 1971. I was awarded my MD in December 1971. Early in 1972, I was asked to present my work at TMH. I learned to my surprise that I was the first Paediatrician from Wits to be awarded an MD.



During my appointment at Edgware General and Barnet Hospitals, I was responsible for the development of a highly regarded Paediatric Service and a Sub-regional Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. In 1996 I was appointed as the North West Thames Regional Advisor in Paediatrics, with responsibility for Paediatric Training. The training in all specialities was undergoing major changes nationally. With three colleagues, I was responsible for implementing a new training programme involving every Paediatric Department in London and its surroundings. You can read my biography here [Katz, Gary](#)

Two more, who started with the six, in 1955

John Festenstein, Radiologist, London



John was a year ahead of us at school and left Highlands North after Form 3, matriculating at Damelin College in 1952. After two years of a BA course, John started medical studies with us in January 1955. Having repeated third year, he graduated in the class of 61. He specialised in Radiology in Boston. When he had to leave the States because his visa expired, he relocated to London, where he had prestigious jobs and obtained his Fellowship of the Royal College of Radiologists. He became a Consultant at Edgware General Hospital in 1977 which merged with Barnet Hospital in 1997; he spent the remainder of his

career at Edgware and Barnet in the company of several South African colleagues, two of whom were also old Highlands North pupils (Les Bernhardt and me - **Gary Katz**). You can see his biography and pictures here: [Festenstein, John](#)

Mervyn Damelin General Practitioner in Mafeking

Mervyn started with us at Medical School in 1955. In second year, he and I were Anatomy partners and in third year Pathology partners. Then Mervyn had to repeat third year. He graduated with John Festenstein, Ivan Samson and Peter Soldin in 1961. After his house jobs he practised as a GP in Mafeking. He subsequently moved back to Johannesburg, where he was **the Medical Superintendent of Edenvale Hospital**. After retiring, he emigrated to Sydney to join his children and grandchildren. Sadly, he died in 2012. You can see his biography here [Damelin, Mervyn](#)



The other three medical graduates from our matric class

In case you are wondering about the other three Highlands North matriculants of 54 who entered medical school at a later date – this is what I know:

Peter Soldin, Pathologist, Vereeniging, (Started 56, Graduated 1961)

Peter started at Highlands North in 1950 and did very well academically. He matriculated with us in 1954 and had a gap year. He started at Wits Medical School in 1956, graduating in 1961. He qualified as a Fellow of the SA Faculty of Pathologists and practised as a Pathologist in Vereeniging.

Ivan Samson, Paediatrician, St Catharines Ontario. (Started 56, Graduated 1961)

Ivan was accepted for medical school with us in 1955. His father, however, insisted that he should rather study economics, and go into his diamond cutting business. Having done one year of that, Ivan was able to switch and take up his medical place the following year. He sailed through Medical School, was elected class representative first year, and served on many student committees. He was also part of the organising committee of the all-African cast of the operetta, **King Kong** presented so spectacularly at the University Great Hall. Ivan specialised in Paediatrics in London and Scotland and emigrated to Canada where he as had a distinguished career in academic and clinical child health in St Catharines Ontario.



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Brian Bethlehem Started 1962, Graduated 1967

After matriculating with us in 1954, Brian did a BA at Wits and was therefore the first in our class to obtain a degree! He started medical school several years after the rest of us, graduating in 1967. He specialised in Anaesthetics. During his training he spent time at the Hammersmith Hospital in London. After returning to South Africa he practised in Johannesburg.

Unparalleled performance

As we have seen, the matric year of 1954 at Highlands North, produced a bumper crop of ten bright students who were accepted at Wits Medical School. With John Festenstein, another Highlands North pupil who started Medical School with us, all eleven contributed much to the student body and to the medical profession in South Africa and around the world.

I had wondered whether this large influx to medicine was something that happened on a regular basis. However, despite much research this does not seem to be the case. There have certainly been many Highlands North medical graduates over the years*, from the first two that were capped in 1954 (the year that our group of 10 matriculated). However, it is clear, that our matric year, is likely to remain an exceptional one.

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compiled by Gary Katz, London from contributions received from his colleagues and further research.

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*To see a list of Highlands North medical graduates over the years, contact garykatz@hotmail.co.uk

Class of 1960 is a project initiated by Chaim M Rosenberg, Chicago

Keep sending your biographies and Newsletter contributions to chaimrosenberg@aol.com