

# Carmel School Bulawayo

My late father left his position as Principal Rabbi of the Federation of Synagogues in London to realize his dream of establishing a Jewish school that would combine the best of secular education with a good Jewish education and religious experience. He became a spokesman for Jewish education at a time when it was not only unfashionable but perceived as an impediment to integration and success in life.

Carmel College was funded in 1948 and as it grew and succeeded my father traveled to Southern Africa and Australia to promote the cause of Jewish education as the best guarantee of survival and help raise money for Jewish schools. In 1956 ( as a reward for good behavior) he took me with him on a lecture tour to South Africa to raise awareness for Jewish education. There I met the dynamic Jewish community and its powerful Chief Rabbi, Professor Louis Rabinowitz as well as seeing for myself, the evils of true apartheid. New schools were set up and amongst them were those that took on the Carmel name. One was in what was then called Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, in the second City of Bulawayo.

Ten years later, while I was a rabbinical student in Jerusalem, Rabbi, Professor Louis Rabinowitz, by then the retired Chief Rabbi of South Africa, sent me out to Bulawayo on a temporary assignment. At that time Southern Rhodesia was a self-governing British territory where the white minority held all the levers of power. When Harold Wilson became prime minister of the UK in 1964, he initiated the "Winds of Change" policy of granting full independence to formerly British African states.

White Rhodesians who were only 5% of the population opposed the prospect of the black majority holding power and under the leadership of Ian Smith, declared the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 ( while still professing loyalty to the Queen). I still have some locally produced toilet paper with Harold Wilson's face printed on it! UDI in effect blocked all progress that had been made towards integrating black and white communities and indeed went into reverse. I arrived in Bulawayo just as Smith was beginning to impose a South African apartheid-like regime.

Bulawayo was a small, vibrant Jewish community, warm, welcoming, and reflecting all the different currents and opinions of Jewish life. It was proud of its Carmel School which had been founded in 1958 and was strongly Zionist. At that time, it was overwhelmingly Jewish but had welcomed both black and Indian pupils who appreciated its ethos and standards.

A month after I arrived Ian Smith proposed what he called the Land Apportionment Act which in practice restricted the races to separate areas and mean that most non-white children would not be allowed to go to Carmel School. The Bulawayo community was divided. Some were in favor of co-operation and excluding non- Jewish children. Others wanted to take a stand.

It so happened that the Central African Zionist Federation had scheduled a

conference in Bulawayo and this issue was on the agenda. I am proud of the fact that I delivered a speech against segregation and in favor of continuing to accept non-Jewish and non-white pupils. And we won the day. Sadly, within a month, Smith passed the Land Apportionment Act and the issue was settled against our wishes.

Carmel school continued and did well. When eventually Zimbabwe gained partial independence in 1978 (full independence in 1980) the school was able to open up again to pupils from outside the Jewish community. Independence under Robert Mugabe turned into a fratricidal and racist disaster. Slowly the Jewish community began to emigrate. The number of Jewish children shrank and today Carmel's student body is non-Jewish. And yet it remains a Jewish school in ethos, strongly pro-Israel, where all its pupils are taught about Judaism and the school calendar runs along Jewish lines.

Carmel's website proudly declares

*Carmel was opened in 1958 when the growing Jewish community in the town of Bulawayo felt there was a need for a school that provided a blend of Jewish and secular education.*

*It began with eight Grade One Jewish children in a make-shift classroom and moved to its present site in 1960 with five teachers and 160 pupils in classes up to Grade Four. By 1964 it was offering classes up to Grade Seven, and at the end of that year, the founding Grade Ones became Carmel's first graduates.*

*While Carmel maintains its Jewish ethos, with Shabbat – candle lighting and blessings – celebrated every Friday and with all Jewish Holy and commemorative days observed, the school became fully integrated with children of all denominations in 1979. This has engendered an environment of respect for diversity of faith, culture, and ethnicity, strong ethics for tolerance, and diversity being among Carmel's defining features.*

*The size of the school provides another distinctive factor and strength. Being a small school all pupils feel part of the same "family"; all pupils participate and find their place in school sporting and cultural events.*

I am attaching a heartwarming youtube video of the children of Carmel School, singing Hatikvah and lighting Shabbat candles. Given the tsunami of hate that has engulfed almost all of the world we live in today, this vignette gives me hope, that with love, commitment, and a sense of independence, the better angels of our nature may be able to overcome the hate we presently see everywhere.

Click here. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2284614188292371> Or you can copy and paste this link

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And this for the school itself